

Submission and *imperium* in the early medieval Insular World

Michael Raymond Davidson

Ph.D University of Edinburgh 2002



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Never Forget

As per regulation 3.8.7, I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and represents my own work.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of princely submissions, and the *imperia* which developed consequently, in the early middle ages. Relations within Britain from the late ninth through to the late tenth century serve as the focus, although some comparisons with contemporary developments in Ireland and on the continent are made. Charters, chronicle and annalistic compositions, literary evidence, and numismatics serve as the primary source material. The study establishes that there are a wide variety of incidents that can be described as 'submissions', and there was no catch-all mechanism by which they were enforced. Furthermore, it is argued that many of the most famous 'submissions' were more innocuous events. Submissions did, however, lead to the creation of multi-ethnic *imperia* in a period which is traditionally seen as a cradle of 'national' origins. While the foundations of the later medieval kingdoms in Britain were laid in this period, this came as a result of dynastic consolidation within these *imperia*, and competition without.

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Abbreviations

- AC *Annales Cambriae* [cited by year] John Williams Ab Ithel, ed., (London, 1860).
- AI *The Annals of Inisfallen* [cited by year and, where applicable, entry number] Seán Mac Airt, ed., (Dublin, 1944).
- ASC *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [cited by year and, where applicable, MS letter.] D. N. Dumville and Simon Keynes, gen. eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, 23 vols., (Cambridge, 1983-). Translation in *EHD* 136-235.
- AU *The Annals of Ulster (to A. D. 1131)* [cited by corrected year and entry number] Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eds. (Dublin, 1983).
- ByT *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version* [cited by year] Thomas Jones, ed. (Cardiff, 1955).
- EHD *English Historical Documents*, vol. I: c. 500-1042, [cited by page] Dorothy Whitelock ed., (London, 1955).
- GRA *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum* [cited by chapter] R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, eds. (Oxford, 1998).
- HRA Annals incorporated into the *Historia Regum* of Symeon of Durham [cited by year, and the letter section in *EHD* 239-54] in Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis monachi Opera omnia*, (London, 1882-5). Translation in *EHD* 239-254.
- HSC *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* [cited by section] in Ted Johnson South, ed. (Cambridge, 2002).
- JW *The Chronicle of John of Worcester* [cited by year] R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, eds. (Oxford, 1995).
- MR *Mercian Register* [cited by year] in Simon Taylor, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. vol 4., MS B. (Cambridge, 1983). Translation in *EHD* 191-9.
- S Document number in P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, (London, 1968). An updated edition by S. E. Kelly is online at <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww/>.

Chapter I: Introduction

Submission and 'national' historiography in ninth- and tenth-century Britain

Debate on the subject of political relations between the various kingdoms in Britain in the ninth and tenth centuries has been a continuing feature of modern historiography. The origins of this debate are not, however, recent, and it may continue for as long as the United Kingdom exists. In 1898, W. H. Stevenson was aware of this continuing slanging match when he wrote on the meeting of kings at Chester in 973, 'As the king of the Scots is said to have been one of the rowers, this event has become involved in the dreary controversies as to the relationship of the Scotch kings to the English crown.'¹ If one looks back to the early eighteenth century, one finds the same debate proceeding in the years before the Treaty of Union between England and Scotland. In 1704 William Atwood published, *The Superiority and Direct Dominion of the Imperial Crown of England, over the Kingdom of Scotland, and the Divine Right of Succession to Both Crowns Inseperable from the Civil*.² James Anderson, an undeterred Scot, responded in the next year with *An Historical Essay, showing that the Crown and Kingdom of Scotland is Imperial and Independent*.³

If one looks still further back, to the reign of Edward I of England, one again finds the debate raging. Before adjudicating the Great Cause, Edward, armed with old English historical writings, queried the Scottish Community of the Realm: 'Can you produce any evidence to show that I am not the rightful suzerain?'⁴ The 'Anglo-Scottish' debate is stressed here for the reason that both the survival of Scotland as a

¹W. H. Stevenson, 'The Great Commendation to King Edgar in 973', *English Historical Review* 13 (1898) 505.

²William Ferguson, 'Imperial crowns: a neglected facet of the background to the Treaty of Union of 1707', *Scottish Historical Review* 53 (1974) 36.

³Ferguson, 'Imperial crowns', 38.

⁴G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert the Bruce: And the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (London, 1965), 45, 46.

separate state into modern times, and real possibility of Scottish independence in the current day, have insured that the debate would often be emotional. In contrast, both the firm subjection of Wales to the English crown from the late thirteenth century, and the comparative weakness of its modern nationalist movement, have made the 'Anglo-Welsh' debate less contentious; it is difficult to find early expressions of the debate. Likewise, the debate on 'Anglo-Welsh' relations in the early medieval period has been neglected in comparison with 'Anglo-Scottish' relations. Modern scholarship has, however, only rarely considered these subjects as parallel developments, and only then in the context of an ever-increasing crescendo of West Saxon, and later 'English' power. Modern scholarship is, as well, in danger of being hijacked by sentiment, not only in Scotland and Wales, but in England as well, where a new debate is progressing regarding what it means to be English in a devolved Britain.⁵ While modern politics make the issue at hand topical, the scholarship will be best served by removing anachronistic assumptions of nationality from the debate, and treating the incidents covered as case studies in early medieval European history.

The roots of the modern debate lie in the work of the nineteenth-century Scottish historian E. W. Robertson. In *Scotland under her Early Kings* Robertson made two main points in his arguments against the superiority of the English crown.⁶ First, he noted the many spurious charters which previous historians had used as evidence. Second, he pointed out that much of the material in post-conquest sources, which most explicitly developed the idea of Scottish subjection, was likely to represent accretion and interpolation in earlier sources, and was therefore not reliable. The predictable English response to Robertson's arguments came in E. A. Freeman's *The History of the Norman Conquest of England*.⁷ He maintained that the superiority of the English king over Scotland is 'one of the best established facts of medieval history,' and went on to say that Robertson 'would never have satisfied himself with such futile

⁵ For a high profile example, see Jeremy Paxman, *The English: a portrait of a people* (London, 1998).

⁶ E. W. Robertson, *Scotland under her Early Kings* (Edinburgh, 1862), vol. ii, 384-8.

⁷ E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England* (Oxford, 1862-79), vol. i.

arguments except under the influence of strong national partiality.⁸ Freeman did, however, admit that the same charge could be levelled against himself. W. H. Stevenson's article, 'The Great Commendation to King Edgar in 973', set the tone for most twentieth-century examinations of the subject. He supported Freeman's arguments regarding the superiority of the English kings, and was the first to notice the passage in Aelfric's *Life of St. Swithin* which probably refers to the meeting at Chester in 973.⁹ The near-contemporary evidence which this provides placed the 'submission' of the Scottish and Welsh kings on firm ground, and no serious objections to Stevenson's point of view were raised for much of this century.

Indeed, Stevenson's arguments resulted in an orthodox position which members of all the British historiographical traditions embraced to a considerable degree: Scottish and Welsh kings accepted the superiority of English kings, and infrequently submitted to them. The views of prominent historians on the events of 973 illustrate this orthodoxy well. F. M. Stenton, citing Stevenson, wrote that 'In any case, the core of the story, which is the acknowledgement of Edgar's supremacy by the other rulers in Britain, is not affected by the possibility that legendary accretions may have gathered around it.'¹⁰ The pioneering Welsh medieval historian J. E. Lloyd wrote:

It is, of course a good deal more difficult to accept the picturesque detail that Edgar sat at the helm while the eight kings rowed him in his barge from the castle to St. John's church and back again - surely a romantic embellishment of the plain unvarnished fact of the submission.¹¹

From the Scottish side, A. O. Anderson noted that, 'The evidence seems to establish that there was a ceremony of subordinating alliance, and that Kenneth II, and King Malcolm of Cumbria were present in it.'¹²

⁸Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, 579.

⁹Stevenson, 'The Great Commendation', 506; Walter W. Skeat, ed., *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. i. (London, 1966), 468.

¹⁰F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd. ed., (Oxford, 1971), 173.

¹¹John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales: From the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 3rd ed., vol. i (London, 1939), p. 349.

¹²A. O. Anderson, 'Anglo-Scottish Relations from Constantine II to William', *Scottish Historical Review*, 42 (1963), 4.

More recent historians have come to very much the same conclusions, including historians employing lately developed 'British Isles' historiography. Eric John wrote that 'Naval power would do much to explain the unwonted peace of Edgar's reign, culminating at Chester in 973, when a number of princelings from the Irish Sea area did him homage, probably by rowing him on the Dee.'¹³ Wendy Davies noted briefly that, 'Later in the century, king Edgar accepted the submission of six kings of Britain at Chester.'¹⁴ The Scottish historian A. A. M. Duncan noted that 'in 973, after Edgar had celebrated his long-deferred coronation, six or eight other rulers acknowledged him as lord at Chester.'¹⁵ Robin Frame, a 'British Isles' historical writer, wrote the following in his discussion of the superior position of the English kings: 'So too were instances of attendance and service by other kings, the most famous being in 973 when King Edgar was rowed on the Dee at Chester by six (or eight) sub-kings from Wales and Scotland.'¹⁶ The resilience of this orthodoxy is well illustrated by a strict contemporary, who, in a very important publication, could note the 'fact' that 'these eight rulers rowed Edgar on the Dee, while the king himself skilfully steered the ship.'¹⁷ It is interesting, and troubling, however, that despite the wide range of agreement on the fact that 'submissions' occurred, no historians have attempted to define what 'submission' was and what it entailed.

In recent years, however, the orthodox view, of Scottish and Welsh rulers 'submitting' to the English kings, has come under heavy fire from several historians. F. T. Wainwright was the first scholar to seriously challenge the consensus, in his 1952 article which revised traditional views on 'The submission to Edward the Elder'.¹⁸

¹³James Campbell, ed., Eric John and Patrick Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1982), 173.

¹⁴Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), 114.

¹⁵A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: the Making of a Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 95.

¹⁶Robin Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles 1100-1400* (Oxford, 1990). Historians have often hedged their bets on the number of kings who attended. There is, however, a bizarre statement on a plaque in the yard of St. John's church in Chester which claims that it was not six, or eight kings who met Edgar, but eleven.

¹⁷Matthew Strickland, 'Military Technology and Conquest: the anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1996) 375.

¹⁸F. T. Wainwright, 'The submission to Edward the Elder', *History* 37 (1952) 114-30.

William Ferguson wrote of the submissions, 'the most significant thing about them is that they are only recorded in English sources, the most explicit of which are post-Conquest and apt to present them as acts of feudal subjection.'¹⁹ The next dissenter was Alfred P. Smyth, who furiously assaulted the traditional historiography of tenth-century British relations in his controversial book *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000*.²⁰ He offered the interesting, but unproven suggestion that 'These meetings between tenth-century kings in Britain were no different from those gatherings in Ireland known as *ríg-dál*, a term best translated as "royal conference" or "parliament of kings".'²¹ Perhaps the most telling criticism, however, has come in Pauline Stafford's *Unification and Conquest*.²² She urged caution in interpreting the evidence for the 'submissions', as the sources are either those produced close to the West Saxon court, or Anglo-Norman accounts written centuries after the events to which they purport to bear witness. She concluded:

When Edward met the rulers of northern Britain at Bakewell in the Peak he met them on the bounds of his territory: their acceptance of him as father and lord is at most a temporary recognition of his power, wishful West Saxon shorthand for several different relationships. Edgar's meeting at Chester in 973 was on the borders of Wales, England and Strathclyde, at a point which symbolized the direction of the common threat from the Irish Sea. All pledged to work together on land and sea. Gestures of ritual submission in the rowing on the Dee are later accretions.²³

Not all criticism of the orthodoxy has, however, significantly advanced the debate. Benjamin T. Hudson recently reiterated the arguments of E. W. Robertson, including some of those which have been subsequently shown to be erroneous, and Patrick Wormald has responded that 'Hudson is playing an old nationalist tune on these matters. It is time that it was heard no more.'²⁴ Again, however, those critical of the

¹⁹William Ferguson, *Scotland's Relations with England: A Survey to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1977), 11.

²⁰Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London, 1984), 215-238.

²¹Smyth, *Warlords*, 228.

²²Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989) 125-127 esp.

²³Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 126.

²⁴Benjamin T. Hudson, *The Kings of Celtic Scotland* (London, 1994), 73; Patrick Wormald, 'Review of Benjamin T. Hudson, *The Kings of Celtic Scotland*', *Innes Review* 46: 170-2.

'submission' interpretation have little attempt to define the terms of the relationship between English kings and the rulers in Wales and Scotland.²⁵

Many questions remain, and modern historiography has left most of these both unasked and unanswered. The question which has received the most comment is whether 'submissions' of Scottish and Welsh rulers occurred, or whether biased or even fabricated evidence makes these claims of 'submission' hazardous to assert. As noted, however, historians are beginning to disagree more than agree on this issue, and this thesis will establish that the answer is in fact ambiguous. The evidence establishes beyond doubt the long-standing conclusion that 'submissions' did occur. This said, however, several of those incidents, including the most famous of these, the supposed rowing on the Dee in 973, which have been traditionally looked upon as 'submissions', were in fact more innocuous events. No unitary interpretation presents itself, but, rather, the evidence for each of the incidents must be examined critically in its own right. This conclusion of course, simply begs more questions, the most important of which is what the practical relationship between the various rulers was, whether or not 'submissions' occurred. Although the evidence does not allow exploration of this question to as great an extent as one would hope, one can establish, from charters, literary evidence and chronicles, mostly through secondary inference, some of the obligations of 'submission.' The Welsh rulers were, for example, likely in a position which required them to grant tribute and infrequent military service to the Æthelwulfing kings from the end of the ninth, through the middle of the tenth centuries.

The most important question that has been left unbegged is, however, simply what historians mean when they use the term 'submission.' If pressed, a collection of historians would likely give answers as different as those if the same were asked to define the terms 'feudal' or 'feudalism.' The one element common to all historians in the

²⁵A number of historians have, more or less satisfactorily, attempted to explain the relationship between the kings in Wales and the kings of Wessex in the early tenth century. Most notable of these is H. R. Loyn, 'Wales and England in the Tenth Century: the Context of the Athelstan Charters', *Welsh History Review* 10 (1980-1) 283-301.

'submission' debate is, however, the complete lack of a definition, perhaps because a dictionary definition of submit along the lines of, 'to give over or yield to the power or authority of another' seems clear enough. This is true, but it does little good to say that X submitted to Y unless one queries the *extent* to which X was subordinate to Y. In some cases, especially those which came as a result of an indecisive military campaign, it is likely that 'submission' entailed nothing more than a tacit, and temporary recognition of the superior lordship of another king. To put it bluntly, the thought of the submitting king may have been, 'Yes you are the big king on the block, now please go away.' As the bond of lordship which was entered into would have, at best, lasted during the lifetime of the two kings involved, historians have been erroneous in reading precedents, 'feudal' or otherwise, into these sorts of 'submissions.' On the other extreme, however, a 'submission' could lead to the eclipse, or ultimate extinction of a regal line or kingdom. One generation might enjoy the status of a *subregulus*, but later generations could be demoted to *duces* or disappear altogether. 'Submission' thus should not, and indeed can not be precisely defined, as it describes a range of relationships. Historians must, however, move beyond the simply record of a submission, and delve into its both its circumstances and long-term effects, if there are any at all.

That the preceding questions have not yet been explored is, however, less an indictment of past historians than a function of the 'national' historical construct still very much in evidence today. Medieval historians working on continental Europe have been fairly successful in abandoning this construct, and indeed Jean Dunbabin prefaced her *France in the Making* book with the immediate disclaimer that it 'might be subtitled "A Nominalist's Approach".'²⁶ Early medieval 'national' history in these islands is, however, still very much a going concern, despite the historiographic revolution for other periods which followed in the wake of J. G. A. Pocock's articles on

²⁶Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making: 843-1180* (Oxford, 1981), vii.

the need for 'British History'.²⁷ This may be because there was less of a problem to begin with, as early medieval historians have more often connected their work beyond its own context. Even in the last year of the past millenium it was still possible, however, to find a new book published with 'Anglo-Saxon England' in the title, which did not address whether or why these terms should be applicable.²⁸ Although James Campbell has recently defended the idea of a collective 'English History' which can be traced back to the seventh century,²⁹ 'England' is certainly an anachronistic term to apply before the tenth century, and the use of 'Anglo-Saxon' has been challenged in an important but neglected article by Susan Reynolds.³⁰ Similar criticisms can be leveled against books which employ the term 'Celtic Scotland' in their titles. When one applies these terms, they begin with the poor assumptions that there were an 'England' and a 'Scotland' to talk about in the early middle ages, and that these were respectively 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Celtic.'

A symptom of this reliance on 'national' constructs of history has been an explosion of recent work exploring the origins of early medieval 'national identity', and one wonders whether Freeman's charge of national partiality could be levelled against some contemporary historians. Steven Fanning is probably correct in stating that 'One of the most important functions of national history is to discover the origins and the unity and nationhood of a particular people.'³¹ His comment should, however, beg the question of whether one should function as a 'national historian'. This historian

²⁷J. G. A. Pocock, 'British History: a Plea for a new subject', *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975) 601-28; J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Limits and Divisions of British History: In search of an unknown subject', *American Historical Review* 87 (1982) 311-36.

²⁸Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes and Donald Scragg, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1999).

²⁹James Campbell, 'The United Kingdom of England: The Anglo-Saxon achievement', in Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History* (London, 1995), at 41-3. In a more recent piece of work, James Campbell, 'What is not known about the reign of Edward the Elder', in N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill eds., *Edward the Elder* (London, 2001), at 22, he has, however, attacked the 'repeated, and inappropriate, use of the term "reconquest" to describe the West Saxon acquisition of much of the Danelaw', and commented on 'attitudes and relationships in c. 900 what-was-to-become-England.'

³⁰Susan Reynolds, 'What do we mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?', *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985) 395-414.

³¹Steven Fanning, 'Bede, *Imperium*, and the Bretwaldas', *Speculum* 66 (1991) 1.

chooses not to, as despite the necessary deconstruction performed by Patrick Wormald and Simon Keynes on the *Bretwalda* issue, the supposed origins of 'English national identity' have been pushed ever earlier.³² Alfred Smyth has argued that the English 'had a clear and developed sense of their collective identity by the seventh century at the very latest', while Nicholas Brooks, in a conference paper delivered in the summer of 1998, argued that their identity had developed by the time of Augustine's mission.³³ This work and that of others relating to the ninth and tenth centuries,³⁴ raises suspicions in the mind of someone with a very recently invented national identity that a subtext of reliance on 'national history' is continuing national or nationalist justification.

There seems, then, to be as much need today for the non-national approach as when it was first advertised by Pocock a generation ago. One can quibble, however, over whether adopting a 'British Isles' approach solves the problem. Even R. R. Davies, one of the foremost proponents of 'British Isles' history, could write, 'It ["British history"] is no historical panacea; it certainly does not imply that the identity of the histories and historiographical traditions of the different countries and peoples of these islands should be subsumed in some unitary all-British model.'³⁵ Attempts at writing 'British Isles' history, notably Hugh Kearney's book, can be criticized for doing just that.³⁶ One faces the problem that one problematic historical construct will simply be

³²Patrick Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the origins of the *Gens Anglorum*' in Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough and Roger Collins, eds., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), 99-129; Simon Keynes, 'Rædwald the Bretwalda', in Calvin B. Kendall and Peter S. Wells, eds., *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo* (Minneapolis, 1992), 103-23. For a rejoinder on the 'Bretwalda' issue which offers some important refinements, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, '"The Continuation of Bede", s.a. 750: high-kings, kings of Tara and "Bretwaldas"', in Alfred P. Smyth, ed., *Seanchas* (Dublin, 2000), 141-5 esp.

³³Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Emergence of English Identity 700-1000', in Alfred P. Smyth, ed., *Medieval Europeans, Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe* (London, 1998), at 25; Nicholas Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity', speaking at the 'Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West' conference at St. Andrews in June.

³⁴Sarah Foot, 'The Making of *Anglecynn*, English Identity Before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* Sixth Series 6 (1996) 24-49; Simon Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in Mark A. S. Blackburn and David Dumville, eds., *Kings Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the ninth century* (Woodbridge, 1998), 1-45; Simon Keynes, 'Edward King of the Anglo-Saxons', in David Hill and N. J. Higham, eds., *Edward the Elder*, 40-66.

³⁵R. R. Davies, 'In praise of British History', in R. R. Davies, ed., *The British Isles 1100-1500: Comparisons, Contrasts and Connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), 23.

³⁶Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: a History of Four Nations* (Cambridge, 1989).

replaced by another, and even the terminology, 'British history' poses problems, as it can be seen to exclude Ireland. The convoluted term 'Atlantic Archipelago' is occasionally employed,³⁷ but few objections can be raised to the terms 'Insular World' and 'Insular history', which will be applied in this thesis, albeit as labels as opposed to constructs. Alex Woolf commented at a recent conference on 'The rebirth of what we can term "Early Insular History"', and this work is seen a contribution to that field.³⁸ The aim is to break down the traditional divisions in early medieval historiography. 'National' constructs which have the effect of enforcing these divisions will, in some cases, be a necessary casualty, although some will doubtless choose to retain them.

It is an assumption of this work, however, that under no circumstances should Insular history be insular history, which follows from much work, beginning with Levison's seminal book, which has illuminated connections between early medieval England and the continent.³⁹ An unfortunate side effect of this work, however, is that connections between various cultures within the Insular World have, with some notable exceptions, been an underexplored area.⁴⁰ One struggles, for example to find in the work of James Campbell, who has left a laudable legacy of scholarship which makes connections with the continent, much interest in the Insular World beyond the borders of modern England; with reference to his review of *The Age of Arthur* 'exception proves rule' comes to mind.⁴¹ Irish sources have been particularly neglected, both for filling out the narrative provided by the often patchy English sources, and in providing a body of comparative data complementing continental evidence. It must be noted,

³⁷Richard S. Thomson, *The Atlantic Archipelago: A political history of the British Isles* (Lewiston, 1986).

³⁸Alex Woolf, 'Onuist son of Uurguist: *tyrannus carnifex* or a David for the Picts?', at Manchester in the Spring of 2000.

³⁹Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth century* (Oxford, 1946); see most recently Joanna Elizabeth Story, *Charlemagne and Northumbria: the Influence of Francia on Northumbrian Politics in the Later Eighth and Early Ninth Centuries* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1996).

⁴⁰See most importantly, D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford, 1970); Patrick Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: some Further Thoughts', in P. E. Szarmach, ed., *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Kalamazoo, 1986), 151-83.

⁴¹James Campbell, 'The Age of Arthur', in James Campbell, ed., *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, 121-130. But see the defence of Campbell by Patrick Wormald, 'James Campbell as Historian', in J. R. Maddicott and D. M. Pallister, eds., *The Medieval State* (London, 2000), xix-xx.

however, that blame for the lack of comparative work would, if meted out, also fall heavily on the shoulders of Irish historians, who have often maintained a rigid insularity. In any case, what few would deny is that any consideration of submissions in ninth- and tenth-century Britain requires application of sources and historiography which extends beyond both the Irish Sea, and the English channel.

One is still, however, left with the problem of what interpretational model these relationships should be placed within if both 'national' and 'British Isles' models are to be rejected. Pauline Stafford, who retained a 'national' outlook despite the heavy revisionist nature of her work, came close to a solution in her comment that 'The tenth and eleventh centuries saw the rise of not one but two large kingdoms in Britain, that of the Scots and that of the English.'⁴² Her approach was laudable, but referring to *imperia* and dynasties rather than kingdoms and peoples is a better solution when one writes about the early middle ages; one might amend her comment to say that 'The tenth and eleventh centuries saw the rise of not one but two large *imperia* in Britain, that of the Mac Ailpín dynasty and that of the Æthelwulfing dynasty.' That these *imperia* developed into medieval kingdoms and early-modern states is not in question, but one errs in adopting a teleological outlook when studying early medieval history.⁴³

Outcome can not be confounded with intention, and much tenth-century evidence in fact suggests that the Æthelwulfing dynasty was more concerned with forging a multi-ethnic *imperium* than expanding an 'English' *regnum*. One must note, as well, that the Mac Ailpín and Æthelwulfing *imperia* had competitors within the Insular World, most notably the Uí Néill kings and the Uí Ímair kings of Dublin. 'Submissions' in the ninth and tenth centuries are largely the product of the internal consolidation and external expansion of these competing *imperia*. The most spectacular incidents to be considered in this thesis came when these *imperia*, inevitably, bumped into each other. The result could be anything from a mutually acceptable accommodation, a climb-down which

⁴²Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 121.

⁴³Simon Keynes, 'Edward, king of the Anglo-Saxons', at 61, suggests, however, that we might 'wish to replace the so-called Whig interpretation of English history with some teleology of our own.'

sowed the seeds of future conflict, to the 'submission' of one or some of the parties involved. Equally important, however, were the interactions between the overlord and the component parts of an *imperium*, as there might be several *regna*, with differing levels of subordination, which comprised the *imperium*, as can be explored in the evidence for Alfred and Edward's reigns.

Adopting an approach based on 'dynastic *imperia*' has its hazards, as the terms 'Mac Ailpín' and 'Æthelwulfing' are, of course, anachronisms; no tenth-century king described himself in such terms. They do, however, make for useful anachronisms to apply to kings in a period where descriptions based on later geographic divisions, or even contemporary ethnicity, are misleading.⁴⁴ True, in some charters Æthelwulfings do describe themselves as *rex Anglorum*, but in others the divisions within the 'English' are made quite clear. The early medieval ethnic labels we find in our sources were far more a function of external, rather than internal recognition. The Irish, for example, were in essence invented by the Welsh, who called their overseas neighbours *gwyddyl*, from which derives the word 'Gael.' The term Welsh itself of course derives from the Old English term *wealh*, or 'foreigner.' Furthermore, it does not follow that even with internal recognition of identity, best exemplified by Bede, that such an identity was adopted by all or even most persons. The fact that Bede invented the 'English People' does not mean they came into being, nor does it mean they possessed any shared sense of political destiny. The evidence establishes, however, that for some Æthelwulfing kings, pushing this sense of a shared past and a shared destiny was an important tool in the extension and consolidation of their *imperium*.

The extent of the evidence on this, and other issues, can be frustratingly slim, and its interpretation is problematic, as in most cases it cannot be corroborated. Can much be read into the statement that 'ealle þa cyngas þe on byssum iglande wæron he [Æthelstan] gewylde?'⁴⁵ Were his claims to be 'rex Anglorum per omnipatransis

⁴⁴Useful anachronisms such as 'Carolingian', 'Merovingian', and 'Byzantine Empire' of course litter early medieval historiography.

⁴⁵*ASC* D 926 [recte 927.] 'He [Æthelstan] subjugated all the kings that were in this island.'

dexteram totius Bryttaniæ regni solio sublimatus' more than hot air?⁴⁶ Contemporary evidence allows one to answer in the affirmative, but in other instances one is forced to consider the evidence of non-contemporary sources, most notably 'Anglo-Norman' chroniclers. These historians sometimes recorded good information that does not survive in contemporary sources, but more often, they added only their own interpretations, or later legend. This original kernel for this project was an investigation into the report of one of these historians, John of Worcester, of the supposed rowing on the river Dee in 973 of Edgar by his eight 'subreguli', which, as will be argued, was likely a good story but little more. This led the current author to believe that the claims which most historians have made regarding the subordination of Scottish and Welsh kings in the ninth and tenth century were false. Evidence for other supposed 'submissions' did, however, tell a different story, which underlined the necessity of viewing each incident within its own context, and moving away from interpretations which stress their place within a broad narrative of 'Anglo-Scottish' or 'Anglo-Welsh' relations.⁴⁷ While such an approach might appear perverse considering recent political developments, it seems a necessary approach for the issue at hand.

Ninth- and tenth-century Britain: the source material

In addressing the bare cupboard of evidence which often faces early medieval historians, and their approach to it, Patrick Wormald recently commented that 'the value of evidence does not, unlike that of other commodities, actually increase with its scarcity.'⁴⁸ There is always the danger that historians, when faced with scraps of contemporary evidence, or fuller evidence recorded in later sources, will attempt to force over-ambitious conclusions upon it. In many cases, cautious suggestions rather than

⁴⁶S 416. 'King of the English, raised by the right hand of the almighty to the throne of the whole kingdom of Britain.'

⁴⁷For an interpretation along these lines, see Anderson, 'Anglo-Scottish relations.'

⁴⁸Patrick Wormald, 'The Emergence of the *Regnum Scottorum*: A Carolingian hegemony?', in Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scotland in Dark Age Britain* (St. Andrews, 1996), 131.

definitive conclusions must be the order of the day. As D. P. Kirby put it, 'All that can be offered are possibilities, occasionally probabilities, rarely certainties. For many, of course, this is part of the attraction and fascination of early medieval history.'⁴⁹ The line between interpretation and speculation, is, as well very fine, and the approach adopted here is to err on the side of caution, even if this means discarding the 'Good Ideas' of both myself and others which are not well enough supported by the evidence. Making these judgments necessitates a consideration of the evidence available towards exploring issues of submission and *imperium* in this period.

If one judges by sheer volume, Latin charters represent the richest body of source material. The list published by Sawyer in 1968, although it did include vernacular documents and wills, encompassed 1875 documents for the period up to 1066, and there have been discoveries in the intervening years.⁵⁰ There is, however, a severe geographic limitation to these documents, as there are very few examples outside Southumbrian areas of Britain.⁵¹ In the late ninth and tenth centuries almost all extant charters from Britain were produced for Æthelwulfing kings, and the locations of the grants described provide crucial evidence for the extent of their royal power.⁵² The corpus of these charters was edited twice in nineteenth century, once by John M. Kemble, and later, although only through to the end of Edgar's reign, by Walter de Gray Birch.⁵³ As noted by C. R. Cheney in 1973, however, 'Even in Birch's day it was evident that this corpus of records. . . needed more critical treatment.'⁵⁴ This treatment is now being provided by an ambitious project, directed by the British Academy, which will involve re-edition of the entire corpus. Little progress was made in the twenty years

⁴⁹D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), xii-xiii. This 'attraction and fascination' certainly applies to the current writer.

⁵⁰P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968). An updated version by S. E. Kelly, which incorporates newly discovered documents, is online at <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww>.

⁵¹On these see Wendy Davies, 'The Latin charter-tradition in western Britain, Brittany and Ireland in the early mediaeval period', in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick, and David Dumville, eds., *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), 258-80.

⁵²For a general discussion of this charter evidence, see *EHD* 337-49.

⁵³John M. Kemble, ed., *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, 6 vols. (London, 1839-48); Walter de Gray Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 3 vols. (London, 1885-93).

⁵⁴A. Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester* (Oxford, 1973), v.

following the first volume, edited by Alastair Campbell, but the last decade has seen the publication of the charters of five archives, including the extremely important volumes on Abingdon Abbey.⁵⁵

This continuing work should provide a great deal of further insight on the land-holdings of various ecclesiastical institutions in Britain, and their estate-history, but it is other aspects of the charter evidence which represent the primary interest in the current study. First, while charter formulae most often represent conventions, when there are periods of innovation they do offer an insight into the ideology and rhetoric of the political community which produces them. The mid-tenth century represents one of these periods of innovation, best illustrated by the elaborate proems which were first seen in 'Æthelstan A' charters.⁵⁶ This innovation reached its peak with the 'Alliterative' charters,⁵⁷ issued primarily in the reigns of Edmund and Eadred, but ended with a move towards standardized forms in the last years of Edgar's reign. The second main point of interest is the charter witness-lists. Although these were not always completely accurate records of persons who were at court when the charter was issued, they do, most often in the reigns of Æthelstan and Eadred, occasionally include the subscriptions of foreign, subordinate kings. As such they both provide valuable evidence for the extent of the *imperia* of various Æthewulfing kings, and give insight into the bounds of their political communities. Ultimately, however, it cannot be forgotten that the role of a charter was, most often, to provide proof of a land grant.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is generally regarded as the fundamental narrative source for this period. As has been occasionally noted, however, this is a misnomer, as there were in fact *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle(s)*, which, uncommonly in early medieval

⁵⁵S. E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of St. Augustine's Abbey Canterbury, and Minster-in-Thamet* (Oxford, 1995); S. E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey* (Oxford, 1996); S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Selsey* (Oxford, 1998); S. E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2000-2001); Sean Miller, ed., *Charters of New Minster, Winchester* (Oxford, 2001).

⁵⁶'Æthelstan A' refers to an unnamed royal scribe active from 928 to 935, who was responsible for drawing up Æthelstan's charters in this period, as argued in the fundamental study of tenth-century charters, Richard Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung* 13 (1935) 335-435.

⁵⁷*EHD* 340.

Europe, were written in the vernacular. Dorothy Whitelock has established a sound chronology and translation for the various versions,⁵⁸ and as with the charters, there is project currently underway which will produce editions of all the extant texts.⁵⁹ Of these, the four editions which are most crucial to the current study, those of manuscripts *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*, have all appeared.⁶⁰ Manuscript *A*, often referred to as the 'Parker Chronicle', is the earliest extant version, and probably dates originally to the late ninth or early tenth century.⁶¹ It received intermittent updates for the next two centuries, but its chief interest is in its unique witness to a detailed chronicle, recording Edward's conquests from 915 to 920, which probably represented 'official history' as viewed by his court.

Manuscript *B* dates to the last decades of the tenth century, and is witness to a text, also in Manuscript *C*, which provides a useful counterpart to the 'official history' in the Parker Chronicle.⁶² This is the 'Mercian Register', a collection of annalistic entries extending from 902 to 924, which occasionally highlight the 'spin' evident in the mainstream chronicle entries.⁶³ The final manuscript to consider, *D*, which probably dates to the mid-eleventh century, also includes the 'Mercian Register', but is of greater interest as a witness, along with manuscript *E*, of the text occasionally referred to as the 'Northern Recension' of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁶⁴ This text reports a number of incidents of diplomacy, such as those in 927 and 973, involving Æthelwulfings and northern kings, which are not reported in other manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Overall, the primary consideration when interpreting these incidents, and the

⁵⁸*EHD* 136-235.

⁵⁹D. N. Dumville and Simon Keynes, gen. eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, 23 vols. (Cambridge, 1983-).

⁶⁰Janet Bately, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. vol. iii, MS A. (Cambridge, 1986); Simon Taylor, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. vol. iv, MS B. (Cambridge, 1983); Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. vol. v, MS C. (Cambridge, 2001); G. P. Cubbin, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. vol. vi, MS D. (Cambridge, 1996).

⁶¹Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xxi.

⁶²Taylor, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xxiii.

⁶³It is clear that this is a separate text, as it is inserted into the manuscript following the entry for the year 915 in both Manuscripts. See *EHD* 110-11; Taylor, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xxxii, 49-51; O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 74-6.

⁶⁴Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xviii-xix, xxvi-xxvii.

other information in these manuscripts, is that one is dealing with composite texts which range in character from bare annalistic notices to 'official history', different genres which require a varying approach to source criticism.

These vernacular narrative sources are complemented both by *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, a late tenth-century Latin translation, with some of the author's own additions, of a lost *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* manuscript,⁶⁵ and by two sets of Latin annals which were incorporated into the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham.⁶⁶ The first set of these annals runs from 732 to 802, and some of its entries correspond to those in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁶⁷ The second set of annals, which runs from 891 through 957, is of even more interest, as it appears inserted in the text in unbroken form, and its content has some parallels with the unique tenth-century entries found in the *E* manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁶⁸ The annals are useful chiefly because, like the 'Mercian Register', they present a version of events which is clearly drawn up from a different perspective than that exhibited in *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Western Britain has also left us Latin annals for this period, although the various recensions of the *Annales Cambriæ* are sorely lacking a modern edition to replace that of John Williams Ab Ithel.⁶⁹ The *A* version, running from 447 through 954, received a diplomatic edition in the nineteenth century, to which John Morris added material from the *B* and *C* versions,⁷⁰ but the unique material in the *B* and *C* versions which postdates 954 was not taken into account.⁷¹ Latin annals related to the *Annales Cambriæ* formed the basis for the early medieval portions of the Welsh

⁶⁵A. Campbell, ed., *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962).

⁶⁶In Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis monachi Opera omnia*, vol. ii., 3-283.

⁶⁷Arnold, *Symeonis*, 28-66; *EHD* 239-51.

⁶⁸Arnold, *Symeonis*, 92-95; *EHD* 251-4.

⁶⁹John Williams Ab Ithel, *Annales Cambriæ* (London), 1860.

⁷⁰E. Phillimore, 'The *Annales Cambriæ* and the Old Welsh Genealogies from Harleian MS. 3859', *Y Cymmrodor* 9 (1888) 141-83; John Morris, ed., *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London, 1980), 85-91.

⁷¹On the *Annles Cambriæ*, see Kathleen Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin Chronicles: *Annales Cambriæ* and Related Texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 69 (1973) 3-28.

vernacular annals, *Brut y Tywysogyon* which, in contrast, have received the attention of a first-rate modern editor.⁷² These annals are, in the words of Thomas Jones, 'independent Welsh translations of three slightly different texts of a Latin chronicle compiled towards the end of the thirteenth century by an anonymous historiographer who probably worked in the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida.'⁷³ The Latin chronicle itself was a 'compilation of a variety of sources from the preceding centuries',⁷⁴ but has unfortunately been lost. While this source was thus finalized long after its ninth and tenth century portions were recorded, the terse annals it contains do not, however, appear to have suffered from accretion in the interval.

Irish annalistic sources also shed some light upon Britain, although Kathryn Grabowski's comment, that 'The full potentiality of the annals, however, has been only superficially realized as the field of Irish annalistic studies is still in its infancy. . .',⁷⁵ holds true today just as much as it did eighteen years ago. Many of the annals still await a modern editor, but even the editions of those which have received this attention have not escaped criticism.⁷⁶ Most of these sources, such as the *Annals of Inisfallen*, display an interest as parochial as that of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁷⁷ The *Annals of Ulster*, in contrast, were more outward-looking, and contain many entries which cast important light on northern Britain in particular.⁷⁸ This is probably a consequence of the close links which existed between Mac Ailpín and Uí Néill kings when the

⁷²Thomas Jones, ed., *Brut y Tywysogyon. Peniarth MS. 20* (Cardiff, 1941); Thomas Jones, ed., *Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS. 20 Version* (Cardiff, 1952); Thomas Jones, ed., *Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version* (Cardiff, 1955); Thomas Jones, ed., *Brenhinedd y Saesson or The Kings of the Saxons*. (Cardiff, 1971).

⁷³Jones, *Brut y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version*, xii. See also John Edward Lloyd, 'The Welsh Chronicles', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 14 (1928) 369-91.

⁷⁴Robert S. Babcock, 'Imbeciles and Normans: The *Ynfyddion* of Gruffudd ap Rhys Reconsidered', *Haskins Society Journal* 4 (1992) 2.

⁷⁵Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Mediaeval Ireland and Wales* (Woodbridge, 1984), 3.

⁷⁶Colmán Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', in Kim McCone and Katharine Simms, eds., *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth, 1996), 141-2.

⁷⁷Seán Mac Airt, ed., *The Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin, 1944).

⁷⁸Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eds., *The Annals of Ulster (to A. D. 1131)* (Dublin, 1983); for a study, see David Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A. D. 431-1050', in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick, and David Dumville, eds., *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), 320-41.

'Chronicle of Ireland' was composed, possibly at Armagh, in the second decade of the tenth century.⁷⁹ As with *Brut Y Tywysogyon*, the main text of the *Annals of Ulster*, as opposed to the marginal additions, does not appear to have suffered from later accretion despite the fact that it has been transmitted through a late medieval manuscript.

The same holds true for the 'Scottish Chronicle', which although it appears in a fourteenth-century manuscript, appears to be a late tenth-century text which was perhaps composed at Dunkeld.⁸⁰ Its chief value is that it provides the sole view of ninth- and tenth-century history from the perspective of the Mac Ailpín dynasty. There are, in addition, two other narrative sources for the period which have clear, or mixed claims towards providing contemporary evidence. The first, Asser's *De Rebus Gestis Ælfredi*, has more than weathered the storm of controversy which resulted from Alfred Smyth's assault on its authenticity.⁸¹ The second, the peculiar text known as the 'Historia de Sancto Cuthberto', has received comparatively little attention, although Ted Johnson South has provided a much needed modern edition and analysis.⁸² The text, a record of both the various land-holdings of, and incidents involving, the Community of St. Cuthbert from the seventh through the eleventh centuries, was likely composed during the reign of Canute. As Luisella Simpson has argued, chapters 1-28 were, however, likely based on sources gathered together in the middle of the tenth-century.⁸³ In these chapters one not only finds records of the visits of Æthelwulfing

⁷⁹See Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an introduction to the Sources* (London, 1972), 114-5; Máire Herbert, 'Rí Eireann, Rí Albann: kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', in Simon Taylor, ed., *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297* (Dublin, 2000), 62-72.

⁸⁰See Benjamin T. Hudson, 'The Scottish Chronicle', *Scottish Historical Review* 77 (1998) 129-61 for an analysis, text, and translation. See also Ian Cowan, 'The Scottish Chronicle in the Poppleton Manuscript', *Innes Review* 32 (1981) 3-21, and David Dumville, 'The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba', in Taylor, ed., *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles*, 73-86, for other fundamental studies.

⁸¹William Henry Stevenson, ed. *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1959); Alfred P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford, 1995). See below, 29-30, for further discussion.

⁸²Ted Johnson South, ed., *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of His Patrimony* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁸³Luisella Simpson, 'The King Alfred/St Cuthbert Episode in the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*: Its Significance for mid-tenth-century English History', 397-411 in Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe, eds., *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community* (Woodbridge, 1989), 397-404. For detailed discussion of the dating issue, see South, *Historia*, 25-32.

kings to the Community, then settled at Chester-le-Street, but those of military actions involving Mac Ailpín kings.

Other contemporary evidence, such as that drawn from literary sources and numismatic studies, poses different interpretational problems, but often provides crucial information. Michael Lapidge's edition of three Latin poems relating to Æthelstan is arguably the most important addition to tenth-century source material in the last generation, and one of these poems provides evidence which supports the idea that the northern kings 'submitted' in 927.⁸⁴ Similarly, the Welsh poem *Armes Prydein Vawr*, probably composed in the mid-tenth century, corroborates evidence from other sources which suggests that Æthelstan and Edmund had extended their *imperium* over Western Britain.⁸⁵ While most of these literary sources are now available to historians, an immense deal of work is still necessary before the potential of the numismatic evidence, which is often neglected by historians, is even partially realized. Recent studies, especially the recent collection of essays edited by Mark Blackburn and David Dumville, do, however, illustrate how fruitful collaboration between the historian and the numismatist can be.⁸⁶ As for the current study, the works of C. E. Blunt and Kenneth Jonsson, on the coinage of Æthelstan and Edgar respectively, are the most crucial.⁸⁷

Law tracts from various parts of the Insular World, while extremely important sources, do not have great application to the study at hand, although recent work on hostage-sureties has certainly thrown light on the theory of tributary relationships.⁸⁸ This is not the only area of early medieval law which has seen highly significant work

⁸⁴Michael Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems as evidence for the reign of Athelstan', *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981) 61-98.

⁸⁵Ifor Williams, ed., *Armes Prydein* (Dublin, 1972). See below, 92-3, for further discussion.

⁸⁶Mark A. S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville, eds., *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1998).

⁸⁷C. E. Blunt, 'The coinage of Athelstan, 924-39. A survey', *British Numismatic Journal* 42 (1973) 35-160; Kenneth Jonsson, *The New Era: the Reformation of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage* (Stockholm, 1987).

⁸⁸Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), 172-6; Robin Chapman Stacey, *The Road to Judgement: From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia, 1994), 82-111.

in recent years. In addition to Stacey's work, the last decade has seen the publication of Thomas Charles-Edwards' monumental study of kinship, although Fergus Kelly's work on a slightly more mundane topic seems best to underline the potential to be found in the legal material.⁸⁹ Patrick Wormald's long-awaited book has now, as well, finally appeared, and should hopefully serve to move study of the less-extensive, but more precisely dateable, English materials along as well.⁹⁰ These materials may occasionally, it is argued, have influenced chroniclers' attempts to explain foreign diplomacy.⁹¹

The sources discussed to this point must serve as the fundamental basis for answering the questions posed in this study, but they have, to a large extent, been overshadowed by later sources, such as 'Anglo-Norman' Chronicles and the saga evidence. The saga evidence, the more problematic of these two categories, provides great temptations to the historian, as it can be used to fill out a narrative which is occasionally bare to a frustrating extent. This was the approach adopted by Alfred Smyth in his books which analyzed the Scandinavian impact on the Insular World.⁹² It is, however, an approach to be avoided, as illustrated by the criticisms of Smyth's works set out in two very notorious review articles,⁹³ and similar application of Middle Irish prophecy has proved problematic as well.⁹⁴

Information in both 'Anglo-Norman' Chronicles such as those of John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury,⁹⁵ and other miscellaneous twelfth-century texts must, however, be taken seriously.⁹⁶ It is clear these sources do, in some cases,

⁸⁹T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993); Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin, 1997).

⁹⁰Patrick Wormald, *The making of English law: King Alfred to the twelfth century*, vol. i. (Oxford, 1999).

⁹¹See below, 116-18.

⁹²Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1975-9); Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles* (Oxford, 1978).

⁹³Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'High-kings, Vikings and other kings', *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1979) 283-323; R. I. Page, 'A Tale of Two Cities', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 335-51.

⁹⁴Benjamin T. Hudson, *Prophecy of Berchan: Irish and Scottish High-Kings of the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1996).

⁹⁵For an introduction to 'Anglo-Norman' chroniclers, see Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to 1307* (London, 1974), 136-85; see below, 71-2, for a discussion of William of Malmesbury's account of Æthelstan's reign.

⁹⁶R. R. Darlington and Patrick McGurk, eds., *The Chronicle of John of Worcester* (Oxford, 1995); R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, eds., *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum*

depend upon lost sources, but their testimony must always be viewed with a healthy skepticism because of the additional lenses of interpretation they introduce. It is, as well, testimony which must be discarded when the accounts either begin to take on a fictitious air, or contradict sources with closer contemporaneity, and it is the occasional failure of historians to adopt this approach which necessitates the current study. Ultimately, however, while the contemporary sources do not tell stories which are as flowery and entertaining as the royal boating expedition which John of Worcester records, they present an interesting, and far more believable picture of diplomacy and foreign relations in the ninth and tenth centuries.

European submissions and *imperia*: comparative evidence

There are many European routes open for comparative study, and Timothy Reuter has highlighted what is probably the most important avenue in his analysis of the tenth-century Æthelwulfing and Ottonian realms.⁹⁷ While he noted crucial differences, he also highlighted important parallels:

Both turn out essentially to be multi-regnal empires under kings from a dynasty of successful war-leaders. . . . Both kingdoms were also imperial in claims and behaviour: the dominance exercised over Welsh and Scots kings by the West Saxon kings was paralleled by that exercised by Ottonians over Elbe Slavs, Poles, Bohemians and Hungarians. . .⁹⁸

One must reflect, however, that current historiography has not established that the Æthelwulfings exercised 'dominance' over their neighbours, so one might raise some questions about purported Ottonian 'dominance' as well. An exploration of the extent of the Ottonian *imperium* falls outside the scope of the present study, but an investigation, along the lines of that presented here for the Æthelwulfings, would be a valuable contribution to the historiography. There is, as well, a thesis or book waiting to be

Anglorum (Oxford, 1998); *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*, in Arnold, ed., vol. i., 17-135; *Libellus de primo adventu Saxonum*, in Arnold, ed., vol. ii., 365-85.

⁹⁷Timothy Reuter, 'The Making of England and Germany, 850-1050: Points of Comparison and Difference', in Smyth, ed., *Medieval Europeans*, 53-70.

⁹⁸Reuter, 'The Making of England and Germany', 56-7.

written which compares the development of Æthelwulfing and Ottonian charter-styles in the tenth-century, without which the conclusions, presented below, regarding 'imperial' rhetoric must remain tentative.⁹⁹

If one looks slightly closer to home, it is not surprising that Einhard recorded many instances of submissions in his *Vita Karoli*, and his account of the submission of 'Duke' Tassilo of the Bavarians to Charlemagne in 787 is particularly instructive:

Cuius contumaciam, quia nimia videbatur, animositas regis ferre nequiverat, ac proinde copiis undique contractis Baioariam petiturus ipse ad Lechum amnem cum magno venit exercitu. Is fluvius Baioarios ab Alamannis dividit. Cuius in ripa castris conlocatis, priusquam provinciam intraret, animum ducis per legatos statuit experiri. Sed nec ille pertinaciter agere vel sibi vel genti utile ratus supplex se regi permisit, obsides qui imperabantur dedit, inter quos et filium suum Theodonem, data insuper fide cum iuramento, quod ab illius potestate ad defectionem nemini suadenti adsentire deberet.¹⁰⁰

This was a common submission mechanism. An invasion, or the threat thereof, resulted in the realization that expressing submission, often by handing over important hostages, was a far better option than actively opposing a superior military force. While in this case the submission was important in more than the short term, this was not always the case, as illustrated by Einhard's account of the wars against the Saxons:

Difficile dictu est, quoties superati ac supplices regi se dididerunt, imperata facturos polliciti sunt, obsides qui imperabantur absque dilatione dederunt, legatos qui mittebantur susceperunt, aliquoties ita domiti et emolliti, ut etiam cultum daemonum dimittere et Christianae religioni se subdere velle promitterent. Sed sicut ad haec facienda aliquoties proni, sic ad eadem pervertenda semper fuere praecipites, non sit ut satis aestimare, ad utrum horum faciliores verius dici possint; quippe cum post inchoatum cum eis bellum vix annus exactus sit, quo non ab eis huiuscemodi facta sit permutatio.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹See below, 123-5, especially.

¹⁰⁰O. Holder-Egger, ed., *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni; Monumentis Germaniae Historicis Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum* (Hanover, 1911), 14. Translation Lewis Thorpe, *Two Lives of Charlemagne* (London, 1969), 'Tassilo's arrogance was too much for the spirited king of the Franks to stomach. Charlemagne summoned his levies from all sides and himself marched against Bavaria with a huge army, coming to the River Lech, which divides the Bavarians from the Germans. He pitched his camp on the bank of this river. Before he invaded the province he determined to discover the intentions of the Duke by sending messengers to him. Tassilo realized that nothing could be gain for himself or his people by his remaining stubborn. He went in person to beg Charlemagne's forgiveness, handed over the hostages who had been demanded, his own son Theodo among them, and, what is more, swore an oath that he would never again listen to anyone who might try to persuade him to revolt against the King's authority.'

¹⁰¹Holder-Egger, 9-10. Translation Thorpe, 62, 'It is hard to say just how many times they were beaten and surrendered as suppliants to Charlemagne, promising to do all that was exacted from them, giving the hostages who were demanded, and this without delay, and receiving the ambassadors who

Aachen, we have a problem. Charlemagne was faced with a fundamental, and obvious difficulty - a 'submission' was quite often good for only as long as it could be enforced, no matter how many pledges or hostages were extracted. Æthelstan faced similar problems in his relations with his northern neighbours. Although Constantín king of Alba submitted in 927 and 934, this did not stop him from being one of the prime players in the coalition defeated by Æthelstan at *Brunanburh* in 937.¹⁰²

In other cases, however, the questions are not as basic as whether a ruler was, or was not, subordinate to another. There could be a great deal of ambiguity in tributary relationships, as has been best illustrated in Julia Smith's work on Brittany and the Carolingians.¹⁰³ She noted, 'The Breton leaders' relationship with Charles the Bald was a fragile balance of co-operation and hostility. But they always acknowledged Carolingian hegemony, however nominal it may have been in fact.'¹⁰⁴ While the Bretons were part of Charles' *imperium*, as illustrated by their repeated acknowledgements of overlordship, this did not stop them from 'revolting' during his moments of weakness. Nor did it stop them, on occasion, from claiming regal title in their charters. Smith argued that, 'It was only to later generations that it looked as if Charles were acknowledging Erispoe and Solomon as independent kings.'¹⁰⁵ This argument seems, however, to make an implicit assumption that acceptance of another person's lordship would impugn one's own kingly status, which, as Irish parallels establish, was not always the case. It is difficult, in a period when royal consecration was the exception rather the norm, to establish what precisely did, or did not constitute

were sent to them. Sometimes they were so cowed and reduced that they even promised to abandon their devil worship and submit willingly to the Christian faith; but, however ready they might seem from time to time to do all this, they were always prepared to break the promises they had made. I cannot really judge which of these two courses can be said to have come the more easily to the Saxons, for, since the very beginning of the war against them, hardly a year passed in which they did not vacillate between surrender and defiance.'

¹⁰²See below, 76-80; 104.

¹⁰³Julia M. H. Smith, *Province and Empire: Brittany and the Carolingians* (Cambridge, 1992), 86-115 especially.

¹⁰⁴Smith, *Province and Empire*, 115.

¹⁰⁵Smith, *Province and Empire*, 114.

regal status. A person might appear regal to one observer, and non-regal to another, and there are many examples of this problem to be found in the Insular World as well.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, sources from the Insular World, and the Irish annals in particular, offer a useful body of comparative evidence.¹⁰⁷ Together, the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Inisfallen* record at least a dozen references to hostage-taking in the tenth century alone.¹⁰⁸ Of even more interest are the records of a number of *rígdála*, or 'royal assemblies', which Alfred Smyth argued were equivalent to the tenth-century diplomatic incidents in Britain.¹⁰⁹ Four *rígdála* which occurred in the ninth century, in 827, 838, 851, and 859, have been discussed by John Bannerman,¹¹⁰ but the *Annals of Ulster* record a further incidents in 737 and 784, and the *Annals of Inisfallen* another in 997, although it is not defined as such.¹¹¹ The case in 784 is of particular interest, as although the main hand of the *Annals* simply records, 'Rígdal iter Donnchad m. nDomnaill 7 Fiachnae m. nAedho Roen occ Innsi na rRígh i nAirthiru Bregh',¹¹² there is a poem, of uncertain date, entered into the margin which notes:

Ossi brigh
in dáil occ Innsi na Rígh.
Donnchadh ní dichet for muir.
Fiachna ní tuidhecht hi tir.

And this is the outcome
Of the meeting at Inis na Rígh:
Donnchad cannot go on the sea
and Fiachna cannot come ashore.¹¹³

Early medieval Irish politics may have been as highly ritualized as their Carolingian counterpart. Fiachna had apparently arrived by sea, but as Francis Byrne has noted, could not step ashore onto Donnchad's territory without implicitly acknowledging his

¹⁰⁶See, for example, James Campbell, 'Bede's *Reges* and *Principes*', in Campbell, ed., *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 85-98.

¹⁰⁷A detailed study into the Irish annalistic evidence for diplomacy, in conjunction with the law tracts, would be another useful book or thesis to see in the future.

¹⁰⁸AI 907; AI 924; AU 955.3; AU 965.6; AI 969.2; AI 983.4; AI 984.2; AI 987.2; AI 996.2; AI 997.2; AU 998.1; AI 998.2.

¹⁰⁹Smyth, *Warlords*, 288.

¹¹⁰John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dabiriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), 161-70.

¹¹¹AU 737.9 (Many thanks to T. M. Charles-Edwards for pointing this incident out to me.); AU 784.8; AI 997.2.

¹¹²AU 784.8. 'A royal meeting between Donnchad son of Domnall and Fiachna son of Aed Rón at Inis na Rígh in eastern Brega.' Although my training in Irish is inadequate, and that in Welsh is nonexistent, I have quoted the original language here and elsewhere for the sake of readers better versed in these matters.

¹¹³AU 784.8. Many thanks to T. M. Charles-Edwards for supplying a better translation of this poem.

superiority, while for Donnchad to board Fiachna's ship, 'would have been tantamount to going into his house-a formal gesture of submission'.¹¹⁴

While there was likely not, in this case, a 'submission' involved, evidence for other *rígdála* tell a different story. While the *Annals of Ulster* record only terse notices of the meetings in 827 and 838,¹¹⁵ the *Annals of Inisfallen* relate a fuller record of the latter incident:

Mordal fer nErend i Cluain Ferta Brénaind, 7 Niall mc Aeda, rí Temrach, do riarad Fédlímmid m. Crimthain corbo lánrí Hérend Fédlímmid in lá sein, 7 co ndessid hi suide abbad Cluana Ferta.¹¹⁶

While one would expect the *Annals of Inisfallen* to display partiality towards the southern king, this entry at least establishes that all participants at *rígdála* need not have been on equal terms. Instead, it seems that submissions, prompted by specific political circumstances, were often on the agenda. The final *rígdál* of the ninth-century throws further light on what might occur. Mael Sechnaill mac Maele Ruanaid, probably the most powerful Uí Néill king of ninth-century Ireland, succeeded in taking the hostages of Munster in both 854 and 856, and followed up on his successes by embarking on a comprehensive invasion in 858.¹¹⁷ By these actions, Mael Sechnaill had probably extended *imperium* over the island, which likely provides the context for the *rígdál* in 859,¹¹⁸ which has been discussed in detail by John Bannerman. He argued that the main business of the meeting was the acceptance of Uí Néill authority by both the men of Ossory and Munster, and concluded that 'the main and, as far as the evidence goes, the only preoccupation of this *rígdál* was to establish future relations between states'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973), 124.

¹¹⁵AU 827.10; AU 838.6.

¹¹⁶AI 838. 'A great assembly of the men of Ireland in Cluain Ferta Brénainn, and Niall son of Aed, king of Temuir, submitted to Feidlimid, son of Crimthann, so that Feidlimid became full king of Ireland that day, and he occupied the abbot's chair of Cluain Ferta.'

¹¹⁷AU 854.2; AU 856.2; AU 858.4.

¹¹⁸AU 859.3.

¹¹⁹Bannerman, 164. If AU 737.10 is to be associated with the meeting described in AU 737.9, then the promulgation of church laws may have been another possible agenda item at a *rígdál*. Many thanks to T. M. Charles-Edwards for this suggestion.

Shorn of the anachronistic term 'states', Bannerman's comments also apply well to the famous diplomatic events of tenth-century Britain. Like the other examples briefly offered here they do, however, constitute a caveat against applying any potted conclusions. Some diplomatic events involved submissions, others did not. Some submissions resulted in the long-term extension of a king's *imperium* or *regnum*. In other cases, subordinate kings took the first opportunity to break any newly-imposed obligations, which is not surprising for a period in which politics were often messy and brutal. One is also faced with situations where there is genuine ambiguity about the subordinate, or even regal status of various individuals. Without any clear answers immediately apparent, the historian can do little more than face the evidence for ninth- and tenth-century Britain armed with the tools of source criticism and common sense.

Chapter II:

Submission and conquest in the reigns of Alfred and Edward¹

If one was forced to rely merely on the evidence of chronicles and annals for relations between various peoples in Britain in the ninth century, then one would be left with little more than a terse catalogue of various invasions and counter-raids. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports how in 815 'gehergade Ecgbryht cyning on Westwalas from eastweardum oþ westweard.'² Soon after, the *Annales Cambriae* record invasions of northern Wales in 816 and 823, and *Brut y Tywysogyon* an invasion of Dyfed in 818 by Coenwulf of Mercia, who was probably also responsible for the other invasions of Wales.³ Later in the century, in 853, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records how King Burgred of Mercia allied himself with King Æthelwulf of Wessex, '7 mid fierde ofer Mierce on Norþwalas 7 hie him alle gehiersume dydon.'⁴ Welsh sources record that 'Saxons' were responsible for the deaths of a certain Meurig in 849, and Rhodri Mawr with his son Gwriad in 878.⁵ Not all traffic was, however, in the same direction, as one reads in *Brut y Twysogyon* how Rhodri's death was avenged at the battle of Conway in 881.⁶ By the end of the century, the evidence suggests cooperation rather than conflict, as there was Welsh participation in Alfred's campaign in 893, and Anarawd ap Rhodri was assisted by 'Angli' in his raids on Ceredigion and Ystrad Tywi in 894.⁷ Yet were it not for the evidence of Asser, it would be extremely difficult to

¹Parts this chapter corresponding to 57-68 have appeared as Michael R. Davidson, 'The (non) submission of the northern kings in 920', in N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill, eds., *Edward the Elder* (London, 2001), 200-11. Careful readers will note some subtle, but significant changes in the arguments presented here.

²ASC 813 [recte 815]. 'King Egbert ravaged in Cornwall, from east to west.'

³AC 816; AC 822 [recte 823]. *ByT* 819 [recte 818] 'Ac y diffeithawd Genulf brenhinyaetheu Dyfet.' 'And Coenwulf ravaged the kingdoms of Dyfed.'

⁴ASC 853. 'And went with his army across Mercia against the Welsh, and made them all submissive to him.'

⁵*ByT* 850 [recte 849]; AC 877 [recte 878]; *AU* 877.1 [recte 878].

⁶*ByT* 881.

⁷ASC 893; AC 894.

make much sense of both the shift in 'Anglo-Welsh' relations which accompanies Alfred's reign, and the more scanty evidence from Edward's reign.

Alfred P. Smyth has, as is well known, made a recent, sustained assault on the authenticity of Asser's *De Rebus Gestis Alfredi*.⁸ Any major critique of Smyth's views would, however, be superfluous in light of the many reviews, written by prominent scholars with views as divergent as David Dumville, David Howlett, Simon Keynes, Michael Lapidge and Jinty Nelson, which have at best found his case not proven.⁹ In a more recent *Alfred* book Richard Abels has, as well, found little in Smyth's arguments.¹⁰ Some reference must, however, be made to Smyth's comments regarding Chapter 80 of Asser, which provides the most critical evidence for understanding the relationship between Alfred and the Welsh kings. Smyth notes that Asser's statement that 'at that time and for a considerable time before, all the districts of southern Wales belonged to King Alfred, and still do' is 'patently not true', and on this basis makes further arguments for the inauthenticity of the text.¹¹ Had Smyth made reference to D. P. Kirby's 1971 article, which he lists in his bibliography but fails to cite in this section, he would have noted that Kirby recognized the 'exaggerated approach' of the writer, and offered a satisfactory explanation of the context of Chapter 80.¹² Smyth also, whether willfully or accidentally, misrepresents the main point of David Dumville's article on the "'Six" Sons of Rhodri Mawr', which was certainly not an 'investigation into the number of Rhodri's sons.'¹³ As Dumville himself noted, 'We should be foolish to imagine that we can know how many sons Rhodri sired.'¹⁴ Dumville was, rather, offering an

⁸Alfred P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford, 1995). It had been thought that Dorothy Whitelock, *The Genuine Asser* (Reading, 1968), had ended the debate on authenticity.

⁹For an extremely telling example, see Janet L. Nelson, 'Review article: Waiting for Alfred', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998) 115-124.

¹⁰Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1998) 318-26.

¹¹Smyth, *King Alfred*, 357-60.

¹²D. P. Kirby, 'Asser and his Life of King Alfred', *Studia Celtica* 6 (1971) 31. Kirby argued for a phase of re-writing, incorporating chapters 80 and 81, which was associated with the wider events of 893-4, and commented, 'In the re-writing of 893-4 he [Asser] could introduce Welsh politics incidentally as part of the background to his own association with the West Saxons.'

¹³David Dumville, 'The "Six" sons of Rhodri Mawr: A Problem in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982) 5-18; Smyth, *King Alfred*, 360.

¹⁴Dumville, 'The "Six" sons', 14.

editorial emendation to a difficult portion of text which has suffered in transmission. The 'sleight of hand' and 'subjective tampering' of which Smyth accused Dumville represent legitimate technique with which all editors of medieval texts are familiar.¹⁵

With this issue addressed, one can turn to chapter 80 itself, and the opening of chapter 81, which are important enough that they must be quoted at length:

[The emendation suggested by Dumville¹⁶ is in italics.]

[80] Illo enim tempore et multo ante omnes regiones dexteralis Britanniae partis ad Ælfred regem pertinebant et adhuc pertinent: Hemeid scilicet, cum omnibus habitatoribus Demeticae regionis, *ui filiorum Rotri compulsus*, regali se subdiderat imperio; Houil quoque filius Ris, rex Gleguising, et Brochmail atque Fernmail filii Mouric, reges Guent, *ui et tyrannide Eadred, comitis, et Merciorum compulsi*, suapte eundem expetiuerunt regem, ut dominium et defensionem ab eo pro inimicis suis haberent. Helised quoque filius Teudubr, rex Brecheniauc, eorundem filiorum Rotri *ui coactus*, dominium regis praefati suapte requisivit. Anaraut quoque filius Rotri, cum suis fratribus, ad postremum amicitiam Northanhymbrorum deserens, de qua nullum bonum nisi damnum habuerat, amicitiam regis studiose requirere ad praesentiam illius aduenit, cumque a rege honorifice receptus esset, et ad manum episcopi in filium confirmationis acceptus, maximisque donis ditatus, se regis dominio cum omnibus suis eadem condicione subdidit, ut in omnibus regiae uoluntati sic oboediens esset, sicut Æthered cum Merciiis.

[81] Nec in uanum illi omnes regis amicitiam acquisiuerunt. Nam, qui desiderauerunt potestatem terrenam augere, invenerunt; qui pecuniam, pecuniam; qui familiaritatem, familiaritatem; qui utramque, utramque. Omnes autem habuerunt amorem et tutelam ac defensionem ab omni parte, qua rex seipsum cum suis omnibus defendere potuit.¹⁷

¹⁵Smyth, *King Alfred*, 361.

¹⁶Dumville, 'The "Six" sons', 13-14.

¹⁷William Henry Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1959), 66-67. Translation Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Alfred the Great* (London, 1983), 96. 'At that time, and for a considerable time before then, all the districts of right-hand [southern] Wales belonged to King Alfred, and still do. That is to say, Hyfaidd, with all the inhabitants of the kingdom of Dyfed, *driven by the might of the sons of Rhodri [Mawr]*, had submitted himself to King Alfred's royal overlordship. Likewise, Hywel ap Rhys (the king of Glywysing) and Brochfael and Ffyrnfael (sons of Meurig and kings of Gwent), driven by the might and tyrannical behaviour of Ealdorman Æthelred and the Mercians, petitioned King Alfred of their own accord, in order to obtain lordship and protection from him in the face of their enemies. Similarly, Elise ap Tewdwr, king of Brycheiniog, being driven by the might of the same sons of Rhodri [Mawr], sought of his own accord the lordship of King Alfred. And Anarawd ap Rhodri, together with his brothers, eventually abandoned his alliance with the Northumbrians (from which he had got no benefit, only a good deal of misfortune) and, eagerly seeking alliance with King Alfred, came to him in person; when he had been received with honour by the king and accepted as a son in confirmation at the hand of a bishop, and showered with extravagant gifts, he subjected himself with all his people to King Alfred's lordship on the same condition as Æthelred and the Mercians, namely that in every respect he would be obedient to the royal will. [81] Nor did all these rulers gain the king's friendship in vain. For those who wished to increase their worldly power were able to do so; those who wished an increase of wealth obtained it; those who wished to be on more intimate terms with the king achieved such intimacy; and those who desired each and every one of these things acquired them. All of them gained support, protection and defence in those cases where the king was able to defend himself and all those in his care.'

Two things are immediately striking about this passage. First, although some kings may have been influenced by attacks from others, the submission to Alfred itself was purely voluntary. Second, the reciprocal nature of the subsequent relationship is stressed. Hyfaidd 'submitted himself to King Alfred's royal overlordship.' Hywel, Brochfael, and Ffyrnfael, 'petitioned King Alfred of their own accord.' Elise 'sought of his accord the lordship of King Alfred.' Anarawd ap Rhodri, 'eagerly seeking alliance with king Alfred, came to him in person.' These comments bear comparison with other sections of Asser's work which describe the nature of various persons' subjection to Alfred. In chapter 76 one is told that, 'Franci autem multi, Frisones, Galli, pagani, Britones, et Scotti, Armorici *sponte se suo dominio subdiderant*, nobiles scilicet et ignobiles.'¹⁸ Asser emphasizes, as well, that after Alfred's restoration of London in 886, 'Ad quem regem omnes Angli et Saxones, qui prius ubique dispersi fuerant aut cum paganis sub captivitate erant, *voluntarie converterunt, et suo dominio se subdiderunt*.'¹⁹ This last comment must, however, raise suspicions in one's mind that the voluntary nature of the submissions is merely Asser's convention. The corresponding entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Asser's source for the event, matter-of-factly states that, '7 him all Angelcyn to cirde þæt buton deniscra monna hæftniede was', thus omitting reference to voluntary submission.²⁰ It seems more likely, however, that Asser's additional comment on this submission represents his interpretation rather than a convention. In other words, Asser was applying his understanding of the voluntary nature of the submissions of the Welsh kings, for which he almost certainly had first-hand knowledge, to those of the 'Angli et Saxones' who submitted in 886. Another possibility is that Asser was attempting to put a friendly gloss on Alfred's

¹⁸Stevenson, *Asser*, 60. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 91. 'Wherefore many Franks, Frisians, Gauls, Vikings, Welshmen, Irishmen and Bretons subjected themselves willingly to his lordship, nobles and commoners alike.'

¹⁹Stevenson, *Asser*, 69. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 98. 'All the Angles and Saxons - those who had formerly been scattered everywhere and were not in captivity with the Vikings - turned willingly to King Alfred and submitted themselves to his lordship.'

²⁰ASC 886. 'And all the English people that were not under subjection to the Danes submitted (literally turned) to him.'

actions, as evidence from Edward's reigns suggests that the term *cierran*, 'to turn', was employed by chroniclers in instances where submission was forced.²¹

In either case, the Welsh submissions during Alfred's reign would have stood in stark contrast to those which took place in 853 at the culmination of a military campaign. Asser gives no suggestion that the submissions were the result of the Welsh kings being browbeaten by Alfred, but instead stresses the other threats which they were facing, and the great benefits which came as a result of their acceptance of Alfred's lordship.²² The most immediately pressing benefit was Alfred's protection. Asser notes that both the 'sons of Rhodri', and Æthelred of Mercia were applying pressure upon various Welsh kings. Although Alfred himself was under pressure from Scandinavian invaders, he was not only unquestionably the most powerful king in southern Britain, but also possessed strong influence in Mercia after Æthelred's submission.²³ In Asser's words, alliance with Alfred would allow, '*qui desideraverunt potestatem terrenam augere, invenerunt*', and Alfred himself would provide '*amorem et tutelam ac defensionem*' when he was able.

Other benefits which Asser describes, most notably the gifts which Alfred's subject kings accrued, are more problematic, and one could argue that these passages stem from the medieval biographer's convention of portraying a generous king. Although, as James Campbell has established, Asser is not solely modeling his biography on Einhard's *Vita Karoli*, Asser's descriptions of Alfred's generosity and financial arrangements may be derivative.²⁴ Einhard writes in chapter 31:

²¹See below, 52-5.

²²Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990), 74, also stresses the 'reciprocal nature' of these relationships.

²³It might be argued that the 'Eadred, comitis' mentioned as the oppressor of Hywel, Rochfael and Ffyrnfael may not be the same person as the Æthelred of Mercia who married Alfred's daughter. Asser does record Æthelred's name more correctly at the end of chapter 80, where he is referred to as 'Æthered', and in chapter 83, where he is called 'Ætheredo.' Asser, or an intervening scribe, does however make the same mistake as in the opening of chapter 80 in chapter 75, where he notes that 'Æthelflæd, adveniente matrimonii tempore, Eadredo, Merciorum comiti, matrimonia copulata est.' See also Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 256, 263.

²⁴James Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', in Christopher Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman, eds., *The Inheritance of Historiography 350-950* (Exeter, 1986), 116-17.

Amabat peregrinos et in eis suscipiendis magnam habebat curam, adeo ut eorum multitudo non solum palatio, verum etiam regno non inmerito videretur onerosa. Ipse tamen prae magnitudine animi huiusmodi pondere minime gravabatur, cum etiam ingentia incommoda laude liberalitatis ac bonae famae mercede compensaret.²⁵

Asser's comments that Anarawd 'maximisque donis ditatus', or that any of the Welsh kings who desired money, received it, also bear comparison with other sections of the *Life*. Asser makes the following comment regarding Alfred's dealings with the 'Franci' and other foreigners who came to serve him. 'Quos omnes, sicut suam propriam gentem, secundum suam dignitatem regebat, diligebat, honorabat, pecunia et potestate ditabat.'²⁶ Asser also relates how Alfred called Werferth, Plegmund, Æthelstan and Werwulf to his court to assist in the *renovatio*, 'et multis honoribus et potestatibus extulit in regno Occidentalium Saxonum.'²⁷ A final example of Asser's portrayal of Alfred as a generous king comes in the discussion of the division of Alfred's income. Asser noted how half the income was to be devoted to secular affairs, with a third of this being spent to reward his thegns, and a further third the craftsmen he had assembled.²⁸ Finally:

Tertiam autem eiusdem partem advenis ex omni gente ad eum advenientibus longe propeque positis et pecuniam ab illo exigentibus, etiam et non exigentibus, unicuique secundum propriam dignitatem, mirabili dispensatione laudabiliter et, sicut scriptum est 'Hilarem datorem diligit Deus,' hilariter impendebat.²⁹

²⁵O. Holder-Egger, ed., *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni; Monumentis Germaniae Historicis Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usus Scholarum* (Hanover, 1911), 26. Translation Lewis Thorpe, *Two Lives of Charlemagne* (London, 1969), 21. 'He loved foreigners and took great pains to make them welcome. So many visited him as a result that they were rightly held to be a burden not only to the palace, but to the entire realm. In his magnanimity he took no notice at all of this criticism, for he considered that his reputation for hospitality and the advantage of the good name which he acquired more than compensated for the great nuisance of their being there.'

²⁶Stevenson, *Asser*, 60. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 91. 'As befitted his royal status, he ruled, loved, honoured and enriched them all with wealth and authority, just as he did his own people.'

²⁷Stevenson, *Asser*, 62. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 93. 'And showered them with many honours and entitlements in the kingdom of the West Saxons.'

²⁸Stevenson, *Asser*, 86-7. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 106. Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', 116, suggests that this division is based on the final section of Einhard, which contains the text of Charlemagne's will.

²⁹Stevenson, *Asser*, 87-8. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 106-7. 'With admirable generosity, in a praiseworthy manner and - as it is written, "God loveth a cheerful giver" [II Corinthians ix, 7] - with a cheerful disposition, he paid out the third portion to foreigners of all races who came to him from places near and far and asked money from him (or even if they did not ask), to each one according to his particular station.'

It is difficult to ascertain, in this great catalogue of generosity, which, as Anton Scharer has argued, was probably modeled on Sedulius Scottus' mirror for princes,³⁰ how seriously Asser's comments regarding the Welsh kings should be taken. One thing that Asser does not say is, however, crucial in understanding Alfred's relationship with them: there is no mention of any tribute which the Welsh kings paid him. This fact stands in marked contrast to the tenth-century relationship between Æthelstan and the Welsh kings.³¹ If, then, the Welsh kings received Alfred's protection, and perhaps benefited from his largesse and offered no tribute in return, what did Alfred have to gain from their submissions?

As discussed above, Kirby noted that Asser's claim that 'all the districts of right-hand [southern] Wales belonged to King Alfred' represents exaggeration, and it should not be taken seriously.³² More crucially, Asser makes a direct comparison between the terms of Anarawd's submission and that of Æthelred of Mercia, although the comparison cannot be completely valid if, as discussed below, Æthelred was not regal.³³ On the basis of this evidence, Kirby argued that, 'The south Welsh rulers simply submitted and received Alfred as their protector, but Anarawd had to be confirmed and had to submit on the same terms as Æthelred and the Mercians, implying a certain stringency.'³⁴ This is certainly what Asser implies in his comment that the terms were 'that in every respect he would be obedient to the royal will', but once again, his interpretation is open to suspicion, as is Kirby's comment that Alfred had 'brought Anarawd to humiliating subjection.'³⁵ As discussed below, the evidence establishes that Æthelred maintained a large measure of independence despite acknowledging the authority of Alfred, and Alfred's authority was almost certainly far

³⁰Anton Scharer, 'The writing of history of King Alfred's court', *Early Medieval Europe* 5 (1996) 194 especially.

³¹See below, 90-93.

³²Unless, as T. M. Charles-Edwards points out to me, 'they belonged to the pattern of alliances built up and headed by Alfred.'

³³See below, 38-41.

³⁴Kirby, 'Asser', 31.

³⁵D. P. Kirby, 'Hywel Dda: Anglophil?', *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976-7) 3.

less extensive in Gwynedd than it was in Mercia. So if not 'obedience', then what could Alfred hope to gain?

In all likelihood, Alfred was attempting both to secure his borders, and gain military assistance should it be required. One need not dwell upon the difficult, and well-explored circumstances of his reign, but should simply note that Alfred's position was often precarious, and it was in his best interests to gain allies if possible. Crucial to the entire situation may have been the alliance which, as Asser notes, Anarawd had made with the Northumbrians. This was probably a greater threat to Mercia than to Wessex, but it raised the prospect that Alfred's fledgling *imperium* might be ringed by enemies. Asser's comment that the alliance had brought only harm to Anarawd may be more than a smug remark. It is possible that this is a reference to action, unnoticed by other sources, which Alfred or Æthelred took against the alliance, and convinced Anarawd that, instead, alliance with Alfred might be the better choice. Two entries, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Annales Cambriae*, illustrate this alliance in action, although the circumstances had clearly changed from those described by Asser in chapter 80. That situation was placed retrospective to Asser's first visits to Alfred's court, which probably took place in 885 and 886, but by 893 some of the kings mentioned were out of the picture, so there had probably been a shakedown not only amongst kingdoms in Wales, but in Alfred's dealing with his western neighbours.³⁶ In the long, and extraordinarily detailed, account of the campaigns of 893, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes that some of the Welsh were among the forces led by Æthelred in the successful siege of Buttington.³⁷ While this case may have been an exception, it is possible that Welsh involvement in other instances went unreported. The *Annales Cambriae* reported that in 894 'Anaraut cum Anglis venit vastare Cereticiaun et Strattui', an invasion which is possibly connected with the death two years earlier of Hyfaidd of

³⁶On Asser's visits to Alfred's court see Keynes and Lapidge, 27. *AC* 885 (*ByT* 886) records that 'Higuel in Roma defunctus est', and he should possibly be associated with the 'Houil quoque filius Ris, rex Gleguising' mention by Asser in chapter 80.

³⁷*ASC* 893.

Dyfed, another king whom Asser reported had submitted to Alfred.³⁸ 'English' involvement in Anarawd's invasion of southern Wales in 894 may have represented reciprocation for his involvement in the campaign of 893, and also served as an example to any kings in Wales who were not on friendly political terms with Alfred. Unfortunately, evidence for 'Anglo-Welsh' relations completely dries up in the following twenty years, so it is not possible to explore the relationship any further.

The evidence does, however, establish that Alfred had embarked on an innovative strategy towards relations with his western neighbours. Unlike his father Æthelwulf in 853, who helped Burgred to enforce submission at the point of a sword, Alfred wielded the carrot rather than the stick. The extensive benefits which Asser describes must, as well, raise the possibility in one's mind that the Welsh kings were not submitting at all, but instead Alfred was cementing a series of mutual alliances in which the parties were equals. While this idea is attractive to modern Welsh sensibilities, it is also an interpretation which is unlikely to be true. Even if Asser's comments about southern Wales 'belonging' to Alfred, and his work's dedication, 'Domino me venerabili piissimoque omnium Britanniae insulae Christianorum rectori, Ælfred, Anglorum Saxonum regi', represent hyperbole, they advertise Alfred's superior position.³⁹ Asser also quite explicitly states their subordination, and further notes that Anarawd had been sponsored in confirmation by Alfred, which implies his subordination as well.⁴⁰ Most crucial, however, is the direct comparison Asser makes between Anarawd's position and that of Æthelred, to whom we will now turn.

While the 'international' submission relations have produced the most contention and debate, a consideration of the careers of Æthelred and Æthelflæd of

³⁸ AC 892, 'Himeyd moritur'; AC 894.

³⁹ Stevenson, Asser, 1. Translation Lapidge and Keynes, *Alfred the Great*, 67. 'To my esteemed and most holy lord, Alfred, ruler of all the Christians of the Island of Britain, king of the Angles and Saxons.'

⁴⁰ On this see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Alliances, Godfathers, Treaties and Boundaries', in Mark A. S. Blackburn and David N. Dumville, eds., *Kings Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, (Woodbridge, 1998), 56.

Mercia illustrate that some of the most instructive evidence can be found in an 'intranational' case. Chronicle and annal, but most importantly charter evidence produces an ambiguous picture of the relationship between Mercia and Wessex during the reigns of Alfred and Edward. Stenton described Æthelred of Mercia's dealings with these kings as follows:

Until his death in 911 he continued to be the loyal ally of Alfred and Edward his son; content with an ealdorman's title, but presiding over the Mercian council and leading the Mercian armies with an authority which was never challenged.⁴¹

More recently, Pauline Stafford chose to emphasize evidence which stresses the independent nature of Æthelred's, and later Æthelflæd's rule, including sources granting them regal title. She concluded that:

We must not assume that from the late ninth century onwards Mercia was politically subordinate to Wessex. The independence of that kingdom lasts in a real form until the death of Æthelflæd in 918.⁴²

The most detailed study of the issue has come from two pieces of work by Simon Keynes, who placed his discussion within a wider narrative of Mercian and West Saxon cooperation from the mid-ninth century.⁴³ He stressed that Æthelred's dealings with Alfred should be interpreted within the context of the creation of a new 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons', which 'represented not so much the combination of the ancient kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia, as the creation of something different and wholly new.'⁴⁴ His general assessment of the situation was as follows:

In short, Æthelred usually acted with the permission of or in association with King Alfred, but occasionally he acted independently of him. . . . Æthelred and Æthelflæd were still joint rulers of the Mercians in the opening years of the tenth century, yet the evidence of charters and coins, demonstrates clearly enough that they operated from the start under Edward's overall control.⁴⁵

⁴¹F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed., (Oxford, 1971), 260.

⁴²Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, (London, 1989), 26.

⁴³Simon Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in Blackburn and Dumville, eds., 1-45; Simon Keynes, 'Edward King of the Anglo-Saxons', in Hill and Higham, eds., 40-66.

⁴⁴Keynes, 'King Alfred', 36.

⁴⁵Keynes, 'King Alfred', 29; 37-38.

To a reasonable extent, both Keynes' and Stafford's conclusions were reached through a selection or emphasis of evidence which spun the argument in either direction towards the dependence or independence of Mercia. A full examination of available sources reveals that there is both need and room for refining lines of argument which are closer than they appear: one which stresses the survival of an independent Mercian kingdom with the qualification that Æthelred was subordinate in the first instance, and another which stresses Alfred and Edward's authority but acknowledges that Æthelred's 'status was clearly quite different from that of other *duces*.'⁴⁶

An essential starting point for this refinement lies in the question of Æthelred and Æthelflæd's regality. While some contemporary sources called Æthelflæd a queen, it is the non-contemporary sources which have perhaps coloured the debate to a more than deserving extent. Middle Irish saga material, perhaps first penned in the late eleventh century, had no hesitancy, for example, in portraying Æthelflæd as 'bainrioghan Saxon', 'Queen of the Saxons', or stating that she 'ga ffuil uile neart Saxon.'⁴⁷ In the twelfth century, Henry of Huntingdon wrote that 'Hec igitur domina tante potentie fertur fuisse, ut a quibusdam non solum domina uel regina, sed etiam rex vocaretur, ad laudem et excellentiam mirificationis sue.'⁴⁸ Such sources do not, however, illuminate the situation in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, but merely illustrate the extent to which Æthelflæd's life captured the imagination of later writers. When one turns to sources with closer contemporaneity the water remains muddy. As Stafford noted, 'the chronicler Æthelweard, using a lost version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, calls him [Æthelred] *king*',⁴⁹ but one must question whether this was the reading in Æthelweard's source, or his own interpretation.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the usage

⁴⁶Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 26; Keynes, 'King Alfred', 29.

⁴⁷Joan Newlon Radner, ed., *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978), xxvi; 168; 172-3. 'holds all authority over the Saxons.'

⁴⁸Diana Greenway, ed., *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum* (Oxford, 1996), 308. 'This lady is said to have been so powerful that in praise and exaltation of her wonderful gifts, some call her not only lady, or queen, but even king.'

⁴⁹Stafford, 26.

⁵⁰A. Campbell, ed., *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962), 49, 'rex Ethered.'

was not consistent, as Æthelweard called Æthelred 'Myrciorum superstes' in his obituary.⁵¹ This said, Welsh and Irish annals called Æthelflæd queen in her obituary, with the A version of the *Annales Cambriae* noting simply that 'Aelfled regina obiit', while the *Annals of Ulster* memorably recorded that 'Eithilfleith, famosissima regina Saxonum, moritur'.⁵²

It must be said that as a result of the multiplicity of Irish kings, historians have been generally distrustful of applying the evidence of Irish annals in this matter, but it would be hasty to dismiss their testimony out of hand. As Donnchadh Ó Corráin ably explained, the three grade model of Irish kingship presented by the law tracts at the latest describes the situation as it was in the eighth century, and things were, in reality, far messier.⁵³ The system had broken down for the most part by the tenth century, and in any case by this time Irish annals rarely called lower-ranking rulers kings.⁵⁴ Furthermore, excepting kings of Alba, it is even rarer for the *Annals of Ulster*, the most outward-looking of the Irish annals, to record obituaries of those based in Britain. The annalist did not find the obituary of Æthelflæd's brother Edward worth the parchment, and of tenth-century kings from the Æthelwulfing dynasty, only Æthelstan's and Edgar's deaths are recorded.⁵⁵ The only other tenth-century obituaries recorded are those of an 'Etulbb ri Saxan Tuaiscirt' in 913, Hywel Dda in 950, Domnall, likely a king of Strathclyde, on pilgrimage in 975, and his son Mael Coluim in 997.⁵⁶ Taken together, both the Irish conventions on whom to call a king, and the paucity of reference in the *Annals of Ulster* to those based in Britain, mean that the entry calling Æthelflæd 'famosissima regina Saxonum' must be accepted as an important piece of evidence.

⁵¹Campbell, 53. It is not clear how *superstes* should be translated in this context, and it is perhaps a term chosen because it was deliberately vague. The possibility that Æthelweard is a member of a cadet branch of the Æthelwulfing dynasty perhaps makes this vagueness all the more significant. (I owe this suggestion to T. M. Charles Edwards.) Campbell, xlviii, suggests 'chief' and notes that the term is 'not elsewhere recorded in insular sources', but translates it as 'lord' in the text.

⁵²AC 918; AU 918.5.

⁵³Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 28-32.

⁵⁴Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland', 1-35 in T. W. Moody, ed., *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence*, (Belfast, 1978), at 9-10.

⁵⁵AU 939.6; AU 975.1.

⁵⁶AU 913.1, 'Eadwulf king of the Saxons of the north'; AU 950.2; AU 975.2; AU 997.5.

The entry does not, however, establish that Æthelred or Æthelflæd were recognized king and queen in their own purported kingdom, as this is a question which can only be answered satisfactorily after recourse to native, contemporary evidence. Only one native source, a Mercian regnal list which gives Æthelred a reign after Ceolwulf, suggests his regality.⁵⁷ As Æthelred was the last person recorded, this list was likely written contemporaneously, which suggests that Æthelred was almost certainly regarded as a king in the first instance. Yet both charters, and contemporary narrative sources from Wessex and Mercia such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the 'Mercian Register' fall short of acknowledging Æthelred and Æthelflæd as royal. As these sources are 'close to home' it does not seem appropriate to refer to them as king and queen for most of their time as rulers.⁵⁸ It would, however, be excessively nominalistic to read into this fact too much about their power, or lack thereof. Yet it does immediately raise a problem with respect to the testimony of the Welsh and Irish annals which call Æthelflæd a queen. Although two important pieces of scholarship in recent generations have emphasized the similarities between the kingship practised in 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Celtic' areas, an answer can be found in recognizing one crucial difference in regal function.⁵⁹ With the exception of a lone penny in the name of Hywel Dda, no coins minted in northern or western Britain, or Ireland have been found which date from before the last decade of the tenth century.⁶⁰ In contrast, minting coins

⁵⁷In BL MS Cotton Tiberius A.xiii, fo 114v. On this manuscript see Neil R. Ker, 'Hemming's Cartulary', in R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin, and R. W. Southern, eds., *Studies in Medieval History presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke* (Oxford, 1948), 49-75. Ker, 50, 69, dates this section of the manuscript to the earlier part of the eleventh century on palaeographic grounds, and on internal evidence to 'not much, if at all, later than 1016.' As the manuscript comprises, for the most part, Worcester records, the inclusion of a Mercian regnal list is not surprising.

⁵⁸As did David Dumville in E. B. Fryde, D. E. Greenway, S. Porter, and I. Roy, eds., *The Handbook of British Chronology*, 3rd ed. (London, 1986), 17-18.

⁵⁹D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford, 1970); Patrick Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: some Further Thoughts', in Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Kalamazoo, 1986), 151-83.

⁶⁰See Michael Dolley, 'Some Irish evidence for the date of the *Crux* coins of Æthelred II', *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973) 147-8 and 152. The first regular minting of coinage in northern Britain occurred only after David I struck silver in the twelfth century, for which see Ian Blanchard, 'Lothian and Beyond: the Economy of the "English Empire" of David I', in John Hatcher and Richard Britnell, eds., *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in the Honour of Edward Miller* (Cambridge, 1996), 23-45.

in one's own name was an integral part of kingship in England from no later than the reign of Offa.⁶¹ During the period in which Æthelred and Æthelflæd held power in Mercia, however, the coins produced in Mercian mints bore the names of Alfred and Edward.⁶² As Simon Keynes put it, 'if the Mercian scribes who wrote Ealdorman Æthelred's charters had occasion to dig into their pockets, they would have come up with a handful of Alfredian coins.'⁶³ Yet while Æthelred and Æthelflæd thus lacked a basic regal power, and it is certainly on this basis off the mark to describe Mercia as an independent kingdom until 918, the numismatic evidence does not prejudice other important questions. Was Æthelred merely a very powerful ealdorman, or should he be viewed as someone with quasi-royal status? What powers were he and Æthelflæd able to wield?

The degree of Mercian military (in)dependence is a good starting point for addressing these questions. In his life of King Alfred, Asser tells us, in a passage already visited, that probably sometime in the 880's:

Houil quoque filius Ris, rex Gleguising, et Brochmail atque Fernmail filii Mouric, reges Guent, vi et tyrannide Eadred, comitis, et Merciorum compulsi, suapte eundem expetivere regem, ut dominium et defensionem ab eo pro inimicis suis haberent.⁶⁴

One might speculate that Æthelred embarked on his action at the instigation of Alfred, or that he was in effect doing Alfred's dirty work. Even if that was true this passage establishes that Æthelred was capable of, and willing to embark on, independent military action. Other evidence establishes a degree of military cooperation between him and Alfred, and the long entry for 893 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is particularly instructive. Most of the entry recounts Alfred's largely successful actions in that year, and he succeeded in putting the army of a certain leader named Hæsten to flight.

⁶¹Patrick Wormald in James Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1982), 118-19.

⁶²Keynes, 'King Alfred', 29-31.

⁶³Keynes, 'King Alfred', 31.

⁶⁴Stevenson, *Asser*, 66. Translation Keynes and Lapidge, *King Alfred*, 96. 'Likewise, Hywel ap Rhys (the king of Glywysing) and Brochfael and Ffyrnfael (sons of Meurig and kings of Gwent), driven by the might and tyrannical behaviour of Ealdorman Æthelred and the Mercians, petitioned the king of their own accord, in order to obtain lordship and protection from him in the face of their enemies.'

Hæsten was able to regroup and, 'swa hergode he on his rice, þone ilcan ende þe Æþelred his cumpæder healdan sceolde.'⁶⁵ After recording the movements of the army, and the 'micel eaca' it received from the Northumbrians and East Anglians, the Chronicler went on to describe the force raised in opposition.⁶⁶

Pa gegaderode Æþered ealdorman 7 Æþelm ealdorman 7 Æþelnoth ealdorman,
7 þa cinges þegnas þe þa æt ham æt þæm geweorcum wæron, of ælcere byrig
be estan Pedredan, ge be westan Sealwuda ge be eastan, ge eac be norþan
Temese and be westan Sæfern, ge eac sum dæl þæs Norðwealcynnes.⁶⁷

The presence of Welsh forces has already been commented on, but most significant for the question at hand is Æthelred's prominence in an almost completely comprehensive Southumbrian muster. Æthelred was likely personally responsible for military activities within Mercia, and served as Alfred's prime lieutenant in cases such as this, when Alfred was otherwise engaged.⁶⁸

For Edward's reign, Keynes highlighted as evidence for Mercian dependence two entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for 909 and 910, which state that Edward 'sende he his fird ægðer ge of Westseaxum ge of Mercum.'⁶⁹ After arguing that the evidence demonstrates that Æthelred and Æthelflæd were 'under Edward's overall control',⁷⁰ Keynes went on to note:

It seems entirely appropriate, under these circumstances, that the (West Saxon) chronicler should represent Edward as sending an army 'both from the West Saxons and from the Mercians' in 909 and 910; and one need not doubt, therefore, that it was Edward who orchestrated the military campaign to conquer the Danes of the southern Danelaw.⁷¹

⁶⁵ASC 893. '[Hæsten] ravaged his kingdom, that very province which Ethelred, his son's godfather, was in charge of.'

⁶⁶ASC 893. Literally 'great addition.'

⁶⁷ASC 893 'Then Ealdorman Ethelred and Ealdorman Æthelhelm and Ealdorman Æthelnoth and the king's thegns who then were at home at the fortresses assembled from every borough east of the Parret, and both west and east of Selwood, and also north of the Thames and west of the Severn, and also some portion of the Welsh people.'

⁶⁸ASC 893. '7 se cyng wæs west on Defnum with þone sciphære.' 'And the king was occupied in the west in Devon against the naval force.'

⁶⁹ASC 909, 910. 'He sent his army both from the West Saxons and Mercians.'

⁷⁰See text cited at note 34.

⁷¹Keynes, 'King Alfred', 38.

Whether or not the chronicler's representation was 'appropriate' seems to be a less important question than whether such joint action under Edward's direction was a common occurrence. Furthermore, Stafford's comment that 'it might be argued that Æthelƿlæd was doing no more than defending traditional Mercian areas and that the appearance of cooperation is an illusion', is an important caveat against purported 'orchestration' of the campaign.⁷² What may be the best interpretation of the entries in 909 and 910 is that they are the proverbial 'exceptions that prove the rule.' During the reigns of Alfred and Edward, the various texts which comprise the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provide an extraordinarily rich, if erratic, narrative of the conflict with Scandinavian invaders, so it is a telling point that of the dozens of passages which record this action, only two mention Mercians under West Saxon control. One might argue in opposition that this was common, and thus not noted elsewhere. Many entries do not explicitly state the composition of forces, and it is certainly possible that in 915 and 918, when the chronicler simply mentioned Edward's *fyrð*, that Mercians were a part of it. In 917, however, it is twice stated that those involved were 'Eadweard cýning mid Westsexna fierde',⁷³ so it is clear that Edward did not always operate with Mercians. Yet as one could spin an *argumentum ex silentio* either in the direction of Mercian involvement, or non-involvement when it is not explicitly stated, there can be no firm conclusion regarding its frequency.

On the question of campaign 'orchestration' during Edward's reign, the *Mercian Register* provides a useful antidote to the heavily spin-doctored accounts found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and establishes that, as in Alfred's reign, Mercians retained a measure of military independence. In addition to relating borough building activities, the Register notes an expedition Æthelƿlæd sent against Brycheiniog in 916, the capture by her forces of both Derby in 917 and Leicester in 918, and a possible 'submission' of the men of York to her in 918, which could also be an exaggerated reference to an

⁷²Stafford, *Unification & Conquest*, 32.

⁷³ASC A 917. 'King Edward with the West Saxon army.'

alliance.⁷⁴ The evidence suggests that the best interpretation lies in a grey area somewhere between the two recent views; Stafford's of a defence of 'traditional Mercian areas,' and Keynes' of a campaign 'orchestrated' by Edward. It is true that the expedition into Wales would seem to fall outside the military interest of Edward, but as both Stenton and Wainwright argued, the course of Æthelflæd's and Edward's campaigns against the Danes at least imply a strong measure of cooperation.⁷⁵ Cooperation is, however, a far cry from orchestration, and the extent of Edward's involvement in Æthelflæd's campaigns must remain an open question. Generally, the evidence describes Mercian military activity which runs the gamut from independent actions, those cooperative with West Saxons, to instances, such as in 909 and 910, when Edward was likely very much in control.

Charter evidence also illustrates a relationship with an elusive description, as the first two charters under Æthelred's name first acknowledge, and then ignore the authority of Alfred. Æthelred first definitively appears in the historical record in a charter from 883⁷⁶ which describes him as 'Æðelræd ealdorman inbrydendre Godes gefe gewelegod and gewlenced mid sume dæle Mercna rices.'⁷⁷ Further on in the charter, however, it is noted that Æthelred is acting 'mid Ælfredes cyninges leafe and gewitnesse.'⁷⁸ Interestingly, however, a charter of the next year reads, 'Ego Æthelred divina largiente gratia principatu et dominio gentis Merciorum subfultus', but fails to acknowledge the authority of Alfred.⁷⁹ In the witness list Æthelred is described as one 'Merciorum gentis ducatum gubernans' in opposition to being called a mere *dux* in *S*

⁷⁴MR 916; MR 917; MR 918. '7 hæfdon eac Eoforwic gehaten 7 hie on wedde geseald, sume mid apum gefæstnod, þæt hie on hire rædenne beon woldan.'

⁷⁵Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 324-29; Mercian military activities are most fully discussed by F.T. Wainwright, 'Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians', in F. T. Wainwright, *Scandinavian England* (Chichester, 1975), ed. H. P. R. Finberg, 305-24.

⁷⁶Keynes, 'King Alfred', 19, suggests he could be the same Æthelred who appears as a witness in *S* 212 and *S* 214, charters of King Burgred from 866 and 869, and notes that later Welsh tradition associates him with the battle of Conway in 881.

⁷⁷*S* 218; Translation and text F. E. Harmer, *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914), 53. 'Ealdorman Æthelred by the inspiration of God's Grace endowed and enriched with a portion of the realm of the Mercians.'

⁷⁸'With King Alfred's leave and witness.'

⁷⁹*S* 219; 'I Æthelred by gift of divine grace supported in the rule and lordship of the Mercian people.'

218. A possible reason for these disparities may lie in the location of the lands involved in the two charters. S 218 describes a grant of privileges to Berkeley Abbey, Gloucestershire, in exchange for land at Stoke, Gloucestershire, and it was of sufficient interest to Alfred that he appeared as a witness. Alfred would probably have had a correspondingly lower interest in the grant of land in S 219 at Himbleton, Worcestershire, which was well within the Mercian heartland, although Cyril Hart has pointed out that the West Saxon ealdorman Æthelfrith appears as a witness, and may have been a 'place man' there to protect Alfred's interests.⁸⁰ Charters from the late 880's display a similar pattern. In 887, Æthelred granted two estates near Dorchester, close to the border between Mercia and Wessex, to Worcester. Alfred witnessed the charter, and it was clear that Æthelred was acting with Alfred's approval, as the charter reads, 'Ego Æthelred gratia domini largiflua concedente dux et patricius gentis Merciorum cum licentia et inpositione manus Ælfredi regis.'⁸¹ Alfred also displayed strong interest in Æthelred's affairs in 889, when 'Ælfred rex Anglorum et Saxonum et Æthelred subregulus et patricius Merciorum' granted land in London to Worcester.⁸² In 888, however, Æthelred, styled 'gratia Dei disponente procurator in domino regni Merciorum' did not mention Alfred's authority when granting land to a certain thegn named Wulfgar.⁸³ As in the case of S 219 the location of the land involved, Walden in Hertfordshire, is well outside the bounds of Wessex, and thus perhaps beyond Alfred's interest.

An undated charter which Keynes note belongs 'Some time in the 890s',⁸⁴ and two documents relating to dispute settlement in the same period suggest, however, that this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. S 223 is a grant of privileges to Worcester

⁸⁰Cyril Hart, 'Athelstan "Half-King" and his family', *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973) 118.

⁸¹S 217. 'I Æthelred by gift of the abundant grace of the Lord ealdorman and *patricius* of the Mercian people with the license and hand imposition of King Alfred.' It is not completely clear what is meant here by *inpositione manus*. Keynes, 'King Alfred', 27, translates this 'sign-manual' and it is possible it is a reference to some sort of a seal.

⁸²S 346. 'Alfred king of the Angles and Saxons, and Æthelred sub-king and *patricius* of the Mercians.'

⁸³S 220. 'By gift of the grace of God *procurator* in the lordship of the kingdom of the Mercians.'

⁸⁴Keynes, 'King Alfred', 28.

by 'Æthelred ealdorman 7 Æthelflaed' made with 'Ælfredes cyninges gewitnesse', and Worcester is of course well within Mercia.⁸⁵ Alfred's interest in Worcester can also be seen in a document from 896 which records how Æthelred presided over an assembly of Mercians with 'Ælfredes cyninges gewitnesse and leafe', which settled a dispute between Bishop Werferth of Worcester and a certain Æthelwold.⁸⁶ Again in 897 a dispute involving Worcester lands was settled by a council led by Æthelred, but with the ultimate consent of Alfred.⁸⁷ Coincidentally or not, the three charters from the 880s describing sole or joint grants by Æthelred, and which acknowledge Alfred's authority also involve Worcester, so it is possible that Alfred was taking a particular interest in that most important of Mercian sees.⁸⁸ Conversely, the two charters which fail to acknowledge Alfred are both lay grants, although because of a lack of evidence, one can only speculate on whether Alfred would have stamped his authority on the proceedings had the lands granted been close to Wessex.⁸⁹

With the advent of Edward's reign, the penning of charters which shed light on relations between West Saxons and Mercians may, however, have been substantially moulded by wider events. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle relates how after Alfred's death and Edward's succession:

7 þa gerad Æþelwold æðeling his fæderan sunu þone ham æt Winburnan, 7 æt Tweoxnam, þaes cynges unþances 7 his witena. . . Þa under þam þa rad se æþeling on niht aweg, 7 gesohte þone here on Norðhymbrum, 7 hi hine underfengon him to cyninge, 7 him to bugon.⁹⁰

⁸⁵S 223. 'King Alfred's witness.'

⁸⁶S 1441. 'King Alfred's witness and leave.'

⁸⁷S 1442.

⁸⁸S 217; S 218; S 346. Werferth was, of course, a player in Alfred's *renovatio*, and, as Asser notes, had been charged with the translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*, for which see Stevenson, *Asser*, 62, and Malcolm Godden, 'Wærferth and King Alfred: the Fate of the Old English *Dialogues*', in Jane Roberts, Janet L. Nelson, and Malcolm Godden, eds., *Alfred the Wise* (Cambridge, 1997), 35-51. One might speculate that Alfred's involvement, or interference in Mercian affairs, however one may view it, came at the instigation of Werferth rather than Alfred.

⁸⁹S 219; S 220.

⁹⁰ASC D 901 [recte 900]. The A manuscript, unlike other versions, does not mention Æthelwold's acceptance as king. 'Then the atheling Æthelwold, his father's brother's son, rode and seized the residence at Wimborne and at *Twinham*, against the will of the king and his councillors. . . Then meanwhile the atheling rode away by night, and went to the Danish army in Northumbria, and they accepted him as king and gave allegiance [literally 'bowed'] to him.'

This was an extremely serious challenge to Edward's power, and Æthelwold even succeeded in forcing the submission of Essex in 902.⁹¹ Thankfully for Edward, Æthelwold was killed soon after in a battle with the men of Kent, although the mention of a 'Byrhtsige Beornodes sunu æðelinges' among the dead on the Danish side suggests some Mercian complicity.⁹² Although there is no direct evidence that Æthelred and Æthelflæd were involved, a charter from 901 suggests that they took advantage of the political turmoil to exert a greater degree of control over their own affairs than they enjoyed under Alfred.⁹³ The titles describing Æthelred and Æthelflæd echo those used for Æthelred in Alfred's reign, but go further, and stop just short of regal title: 'Æthelred Æthelfled quoque opitulante gratuita Dei gratia monarchiam Merceorum tenentes honorificeque gubernantes et defendentes.'⁹⁴ Perhaps more significantly, although it did not involve Worcester, this was their first ecclesiastical charter which failed to mention the West Saxon king.

Three charters from 903 suggest, however, that Edward was able to re-assert his authority following the, from his point of view, successful end to the crisis brought about by Æthelwold's contention for the throne.⁹⁵ Excepting the lands involved, the charters are nearly identical, and relate the saga of a certain ealdorman Æthelfrith and his burnt muniment box. They seem to relate a strongly West Saxon view of the political relationship between Edward, and Æthelred and Æthelflæd, and are further notable because bishop Werferth of Worcester, (contumaciously?) absent from Edward's early charters, appears as a witness. The Islington charter reads, 'Tali igitur necessitate cogente predictus dux Eadwardum regem rogavit Æthelredum quoque

⁹¹ASC B 904 [recte 902]. 'Her com Æthelwold hider ofer sæ mid eallum thæm flotan the he begitan mihte and him to gebogen wæs on Eastsexum.' 'In this year Æthelwold came hither across the sea with all the fleet he could procure, and submission was made to him in Essex.

⁹²ASC 903 'Brihtsige son of the atheling Beornoth.' On this incident see Stenton, 321-22, who notes that he 'was probably a landless descendant of the royal house of Mercia'.

⁹³I owe this suggestion to Greg Rose. Another possibility is that the relationship between Æthelred and Alfred would not necessarily carry over the reign of Alfred's successor, and that Edward would have had to work for Æthelred's submission under any circumstances.

⁹⁴S 221.

⁹⁵S 367; S 371; S 367a, a recent discovery, is edited in Simon Keynes, 'A charter of King Edward the Elder from Islington', *Historical Research* 66 (1993) 303-16.

Æthelfredamque qui tunc principatum potestatemque gentis Merciorum sub predicto rege tenuerunt.⁹⁶ As Keynes has pointed out, the three charters are all ultimately received through different institutions, so it would be quite a conspiracy if any of these charters are forged, and as such provide a clear snapshot of the situation in that year.⁹⁷ Yet if Hart is correct that Æthelfrith was a West Saxon placeman, then conspiracy theorists may wish to speculate about the circumstances under which the old charters went up in flames. Whatever the truth of the matter, Edward seized the moment, although it must be noted that of the lands involved, Risborough in Buckinghamshire and Islington were not well within Mercia, while Wrington in Somerset was in the West Saxon heartland. Edward was able to flex his muscles slightly further in 904, when along with 'Æthelred dux et dominator Merciorum' and Æthelflæd he reconfirmed a grant of land at Eaton, just north of Oxford.⁹⁸ Unfortunately, following a charter of 904 where Edward goes unmentioned, in which Bishop Werferth granted a lease to Æthelred and Æthelflæd 'Myrcna hlafordas', the charter evidence almost completely dries up.⁹⁹ Between 904 and 918 there are but two charters of Mercian interest which are extant, both of which are sole grants made by Æthelflæd after the death of her husband. The first, which can perhaps be dated to 914, calls Æthelflæd 'domina Merciorum', fails to mention Edward, and describes a grant of land at Stanton, just south of Derby and thus very close to Mercia's northeast border with Scandinavian occupied territory, made to 'meo fideli amico Alchelve'.¹⁰⁰ The second is another lay

⁹⁶Keynes, 'A charter', 310. Translation Keynes, 'A charter', 310-11. 'Accordingly the aforesaid ealdorman, impelled by such necessity, petitioned King Edward, and also Æthelred and Æthelflæd, who then held rulership and power over the race of the Mercians under the aforesaid king.'

⁹⁷Keynes, 'Edward', 53.

⁹⁸S 361. 'Æthelred ealdorman and ruler of the Mercians.'

⁹⁹S 1280. 'Lords of Mercia.' For some heartbreaking analysis of the reasons for the lack of surviving charters in the later part of Edward's reign see Patrick Wormald, 'On *þa wæpnedhealf*: kingship and royal property from Æthelwulf to Edward the Elder', in Higham and Hill, eds., *Edward the Elder*, 275-6.

¹⁰⁰S 224. 'Lady of the Mercians'; 'My faithful friend Alchelm.' On this charter and its dating see P. H. Sawyer, *Charters of Burton Abbey* (Oxford 1979), 1-2. He notes that the 'charter, although abbreviated and miscopied, seems to be authentic'. The proposed date of 914 fits the indiction, and a grant of land this far north would have been unlikely before the fortification of Tamworth and Stafford in 913, noted by the *Mercian Register*. Werferth of Worcester appears in the witness list, so a possible terminal date is provided by his obituary in *JW* 915. Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), 570ff

grant, made in 915 to an Eadric, of land at Farnborough in Warwickshire.¹⁰¹ Once again, Edward is not mentioned, and Æthelflæd is styled 'juvante superna pietate et largiente clementia Christi gubernacula regens Merciorum.'¹⁰²

Although one would ideally wish to have at one's disposal runs of extant charters in the 890s, and the period from 904-18 as good as those from the 880s and from 900-904, the evidence helps one to move with more certainty towards a conclusion. In Alfred's reign Æthelred is styled variously *patricius*, *subregulus*, or *procurator*, a title otherwise unused in Anglo-Saxon charters, in addition to the commonly used title of *ealdorman*. The intense variety displayed may indicate that while the scribes were not at loss for words, there was perhaps contention, and possibly confusion regarding Æthelred's precise status. The term *patricius* is, for example used in an eighth-century Northumbrian annal preserved in Symeon of Durham's *Historia Regum*, to apply to a nobleman there.¹⁰³ Whitelock notes that this term 'is used elsewhere in a way that suggests that it was confined to very outstanding and powerful men.'¹⁰⁴ The term *subregulus* is a better attested term, and was occasionally applied to subordinate kings, such as those of the Hwicce, in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁰⁵ As the term itself implies, those with this label were probably considered quasi-regal, and it was among many terms which could be applied to, as Campbell put it, 'lesser potentates.' He noted, 'It would have been possible in the eighth century for the same man to have been described by different writers and in different contexts as *rex*, *subregulus*, *princeps*, *dux*, *praefectus* and *comes*.'¹⁰⁶ This similar, and perhaps

unconvincingly counters that Sawyer's dating 'requires a whole range of unlikely suppositions to fit it to the later date', and argues that it should be dated to 900. It would be bizarre, however, if Æthelflæd was able to make a grant of land which, in 900, was likely occupied by Scandinavians.

¹⁰¹Farnborough in Berkshire is the traditional assumption, but Susan Kelly, *Charters of Abingdon*, vol. i. (Oxford, 2000), suggests the Farnborough in Warwickshire, and this seems more likely considering that it is in Mercia rather than Wessex.

¹⁰²S. 225. 'Administering the government of the Mercians with the help of heavenly piety and by the grant of Christ's clemency.'

¹⁰³HRA A 788.

¹⁰⁴EHD 244.

¹⁰⁵H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester, 1961) 167-80.

¹⁰⁶James Campbell, 'Bede's *Reges* and *Principes*', in James Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 91.

deliberate, variety in titular applied to Æthelred seems to indicate a similar, 'quasi-regal' status. As Richard Abels put it, the clerics who drafted Æthelred's charters 'Were forced into impressive circumlocutions in order to define his authority.' He noted further that the titles applied represented 'the language of regality; only the title "rex" is lacking.'¹⁰⁷

Two final pieces of evidence support the idea of Æthelred's high status. During the course of Hæsten's campaigns in 893, his wife and two sons were captured, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reported, '7 Hæstenes wif 7 his suna twegen mon brohte to bæm cyninge [Alfred], 7 he hi him eft ageaf, forþæm þe hiora wæs oþer his godsunu, oþer Æðeredes ealdormonnes.'¹⁰⁸ T. M. Charles-Edwards notes that the strength of spiritual kinship that this *compaternitas* effected was less significant than that of direct godparentage, and that in Frankish diplomacy it 'was used to cement an alliance between equals.'¹⁰⁹ Since both Alfred and Æthelred were godparents to Hæsten's sons, then it strongly suggests that Æthelred's status was close to that of Alfred. A final thing to consider is Æthelred's marriage to Æthelflæd. Royal women were a problem for both their fathers and their brothers, as they provided an opportunity for upstart rulers to add some legitimacy to their rule. When one considers the potential for dynastic rivalry which the marriage of a royal daughter could produce, it is clear that no shrewd ruler entered into such a marriage alliance lightly, as the intrigues involving the final marriage of Alfred's stepmother Judith establish.¹¹⁰ This example would have been firmly within Alfred's mind, so the marriage of Æthelred to a high status woman, in this case Alfred's own daughter suggests the cementing of an alliance, albeit with Alfred as the senior partner, rather than any attempt at a rigid attempt at Æthelred's subordination. Like the Baldwins of Flanders, who scored royal matches in subsequent generations, Æthelred was likely being deliberately integrated into the growing network of European marriage alliances.

¹⁰⁷Abels, *Alfred*, 181.

¹⁰⁸*ASC* 893. 'And Hæsten's wife and two sons were brought to them king; and he gave them back to him, because one of them was his godson, and the other the godson of Ealdorman Ethelred.'

¹⁰⁹Charles-Edwards, 'Alliances', 56-7.

¹¹⁰On this see Janet L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), 203-4.

Taken together, the evidence establishes that Æthelred was not merely a powerful ealdorman, but a quasi-regal figure who was all but the ruler of an 'independent kingdom.' After his death, Æthelflæd was able to maintain this status in her role as that rarity in medieval Europe, the female ruler. One might argue that this was made possible because she was Edward's sister, but one must question the assumption that she would have retained more loyalty to her brother than a husband of roughly twenty-five years. This, necessarily, raises serious questions about the effectiveness of Alfred and Edward's policy of working to include Mercia within a new 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons.' Simon Keynes recently wrote that:

The new political order was far more than a catchy phrase: it was real, and substantial, and deserves to be taken seriously. Indeed the 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' provides us with a context for understanding the various political developments in the first and second decades of the tenth century, not to mention the organization of a famous military campaign.¹¹¹

While Keynes has certainly established that this idea was being effectively promoted within the court intelligentsia, the fact that, as late as 915, Æthelflæd could grant land without invoking the authority of Edward suggests that the aim of creating a new, unitary kingdom had not been achieved.¹¹² Mercians might pay lip service to their 'Anglo-Saxon' king, and fall short of claiming for their rulers a regal status, but the new political community had not fully come into being. The events of 918, rather than vindicating the concept of the new kingdom, underscore the point that its acceptance within Mercia was, at best, slow in coming. The account in the Parker Chronicle seems to be sanitized; it simply reports that, after Æthelflæd's death, '7 þa gerad he [Edward] þa burg æt Tameworþige, 7 him cierende to eall se þeodscype on Myrcna lande þe Æþelflæde ær underþeoded wæs.¹¹³ The *Mercian Register* reports that this submission in fact, required a coup. 'Her eac wearð Æþelredes dohter, Myrcna halfordes, ælces anwealdes on Myrcum benumen, 7 on Westseaxe alæded þrym

¹¹¹Keynes, 'Edward', 57.

¹¹²S 225.

¹¹³ASC A 918. 'And then he [Edward] occupied the borough of Tamworth, and all the nation in the land of the Mercians which had been subject to Æthelflæd submitted to him.'

wucum ær middanwintre, se wæs haten Ælfwyn.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, ideology had not been effective, and Edward was forced to resort to the sword to bring Mercia under his direct control.

Edward's ultimate strategy towards the integration of Mercia mirrored that towards the other areas he brought under his rule during the military successes of the 910s.¹¹⁵ This period offers the richest evidence, from narrative sources, for submissions in Britain, and a variety of terminology is employed by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to express the events. Most often, the sources indicate that various persons 'bowed' or 'turned' to Edward, or alternately 'accepted him as their lord.' This was, mostly likely, made possible by his success at Tettenhall in 910, triumphantly recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which seems to have been that rarity in the Middle Ages, a decisive battle. By 912 he was campaigning in Essex, which had 'bowed' to Æthelwold in 902.¹¹⁶ One reads that at the culmination of this campaign, '7 him beag god dæl þæs folces to þe ær under deniscra manna anwalde wæron.'¹¹⁷ One sees the first use of the other main submission phrase at the culmination of the entry, surpassed in length only by that in 917, for 914:

7 Purcytel eorl hine gesohte him to hlaforde 7 þa holdas ealle, 7 þa ieldstan men ealle mæste ðe to Bedanforda hierdon 7 eac monige þara þe to Hamtune hierdon.¹¹⁸

Where Bedford was concerned this was not, however, the end of the story, as one reads in the next year, at the opening of the section of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which is peculiar to the Parker Chronicle:

¹¹⁴MR 919. 'In this year also the daughter of Ethelred, lord of the Mercians, was deprived of all authority and taken into Wessex, three weeks before Christmas. She was called Ælfwyn.'

¹¹⁵For a detailed narrative of these campaigns, which fall outside the scope of the present study, see Stenton, 323-32.

¹¹⁶ASC B 904 [recte 902]. 'him to gebogen.'

¹¹⁷ASC 912. 'And a good number of the people who had been under the rule of the Danish men submitted [bowed] to him.'

¹¹⁸ASC 914. 'And Earl Thurcetul came and accepted [sought] him as his lord, and so did all the holds and the principal men who belonged to Bedford, and also many of those who belonged to Northampton.' According to ASC A this Earl Thurcetul departed for France in 916.

Her on þys gere Eadweard cyng for mid fierde to Bedanforda foran to Martines
mæssan 7 beget þa burg, 7 him cirdon to mæst ealle þa hie ær budon.¹¹⁹

These two entries suggest that the differences in the ways submission was recorded represent more than a turn of phrase; that the 'submitting', literally 'turning' followed the 'acceptance as lord' implies a greater level of stringency than that entailed by a simple acceptance of lordship.

This conclusion is broadly borne out by the events of 917 and 918. The concluding portions of the extraordinarily detailed entry for 917 contain a number of references to submissions, and one sees the twinning of the two methods in the following entry:

7 him cirde to Purferþ eorl 7 þa holdas, 7 eal se here þe to Hamtune hierde
norþ op Weolud 7 sohton hine him to hlaforde 7 to mundboran.¹²⁰

A slightly different, and ominous spin was put upon the submission of the people around Huntingdon after its capture:

7 þæt folc eal þæt þær to lafe wæs þara landleoda beag to Edwearde cyninge 7
sohton his friþ 7 his mundbyrde.¹²¹

By this time, Edward seemingly had the bit in his teeth, and the entry for 917 concluded:

7 him cirde micel folc to ægþer ge on Eastenglum ge on Eastseaxum þe ær
under Dena anwalde wæs, 7 eal se here on Eastenglum him swor annesse þæt
hie eal þæt woldon þæt he wolde, 7 eall þæt friþian woldon þæt se cyng friþian
wolde, ægþer ge on sæ ge on lande; 7 se here þe to Grantanbrycge hierde hine
geces synderlice him to hlaforde 7 to mundboran 7 þæt fæstnodon mid apum
swa swa he hit þa ared.¹²²

¹¹⁹ASC A 915. 'In this year King Edward went with his army to Bedford, before Martinmas, and obtained the borough; and almost all the citizens, who dwelt there before, submitted [turned] to him.'

¹²⁰ASCA 917. 'And Earl Thurferth and the holds submitted [turned] to him and so did all the army which belonged to Northampton, as far north as the Welland, and sought to have him as their lord and protector.'

¹²¹ASC A 917. 'And all the people of that district who had survived submitted [bowed] to King Edward and asked for his peace and protection.'

¹²²ASC A 917. 'And many people who had been under the rule of the Danes both in East Anglia and in Essex submitted [turned] to him; and all the army in East Anglia swore agreement with him, that the would (agree to) all that he would, and would keep peace with all with whom the king wished to

The mere 'acceptance as lord' was thus not used in isolation, as it had been in 914. The 'acceptance of Edward's lordship' by the army of Cambridge was coupled with the swearing of oaths, while the people of East Anglia and Essex 'turned' to Edward without specific reference to his lordship.¹²³ Edward's Southumbrian conquests culminated in 918. He first went to Stamford to build fortifications on the south side of the river, '7 ðæt folc eal ðe to ðære norþerran byrig hierde him beah to 7 sohtan hine him to hlaforde.'¹²⁴ Edward was then presented with the crisis, or perhaps more accurately the opportunity of Æthelflæd's death, which led to the 'submission' of the Welsh kings.¹²⁵ The entry for the year concluded with a notice of the capture of Nottingham, and a further statement of the Mercian submission: '7 him cierde eall þæt folc to þe on Mercna lande geseten wæs, ægþer ge denisc ge englisc.'¹²⁶

There were two fundamental differences between these submissions and those, involving Æthelred, Æthelflæd, and the Welsh kings, which have been previously discussed. First, the submissions came at the culmination of military campaigns, or presumably under the threat thereof. As such, one cannot argue for the sort of reciprocal, and in all probability friendly relations between the overlord and the submitter which one gathers from Alfred's dealing with the Welsh kings. Second, and probably more importantly, these submissions resulted in an expansion of Edward's *regnum* rather than *imperium*. Alfred had brought the Welsh kings and Mercia into his *imperium*, but the more vigorous lordship which would indicate integration within his *regnum* was lacking. In contrast, as Richard Abels has convincingly argued, Edward required of those whom he opposed in the 910s, 'that they submit to him *with their*

keep peace, both at sea and on land. And the army which belonged to Cambridge chose him especially as its lord and protector, and established it with oaths just as he decreed it.'

¹²³The stated conditions for the anomalous submission here, that of the East Anglians, may derive from the law codes. See Richard Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), 83-4.

¹²⁴ASC A 918. 'And all the people who belonged to the more northern borough submitted [bowed] to him and sought to have him as their lord.'

¹²⁵See below, 55-7.

¹²⁶ASC A 918. 'And all the people who had settled in Mercia, both Danish and English, submitted [turned] to him.'

lands.¹²⁷ This policy, coupled with the coup in Mercia, effected a marked expansion of his *regnum*, and the shiring of the Midlands establishes that this was an effective expansion.¹²⁸

While these submissions were definitely important in the long term, one cannot say the same thing for the more famous 'submissions', of Welsh and northern kings. The context for both of these 'submissions' is not obvious. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Annales Cambriae* do not report any conflict or accommodation between the Welsh and their eastern neighbours between the years 894 and 916. In that year, the *Mercian Register* records how 'sende Æþelflæd fyrð on Wealas 7 abræc Breccanmere 7 þær genam þæs cinges wif feower 7 ðritiga sume.'¹²⁹ In the same year, the *Annales Cambriae* record the death of Anarawd ap Rhodri.¹³⁰ In 918, with the death of Æthelflæd, all the most important players in the politics of Mercia and Wales since the 890s had died. It is in the aftermath of Æthelflæd's death that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports the submission of the Welsh kings to Edward, so he may have been looking for an assurance from them that they would accept his control of Mercia, and respect its borders: '7 þa cyningas on Norþwealum, Howel 7 Cleauc 7 Ieopwel, 7 eall Norþwealcyn hine sohton him to hlaforde.'¹³¹ All these kings can be easily identified. 'Howel' was the famous Hywel Dda, king of Dyfed in this period, 'Cleauc' was his brother, and 'Ieopwel' was Idwal, the king of Gwynedd killed by Edmund in 942. Although the imperfect state of knowledge about tenth-century Wales prevents us from

¹²⁷Abels, *Lordship*, 88. Abels, 88-9, cites a later tenth-century case, recorded in the *Liber Eliensis*, in which a belated submission of a woman to Edward resulted in the loss of her grandson's rights to an estate which had been forfeited to the crown.

¹²⁸This development has, in the past been placed in the early eleventh century, but Cyril Hart, *The Hidation of Northamptonshire* (Leicester, 1970), 14, argues convincingly that this took place shortly after Edward's and Æthelflæd's conquests. David Hill, 'The shiring of Mercia – again', in Higham and Hill, eds., *Edward the Elder*, 144-59, at 145, also highlights the circumstantial evidence of the 'capital' of Mercia, Tamworth, being split by the shire boundaries.

¹²⁹MR 916. 'Æthelflæd sent an army into Wales and destroyed Breccanmere, and captured the king's wife and 33 other persons.'

¹³⁰AC 916.

¹³¹ASC A 918. 'And the kings in Wales, Hywel, Clydog, and Idwal, and all the race of the Welsh, sought to have him as lord.'

saying that these were in fact all the kings in Wales, they were, most likely, the most important players, and were all grandsons of Rhodri Mawr.

The question of whether, as the chronicler reports, these kings submitted to Edward, is, however, extremely sticky, despite the consensus, perhaps best stated by Stenton, that the Welsh kings:

Showed themselves willing, if not eager, to accept Edward as their lord. . . Their submission made him the overlord of the whole western half of Wales, and the *Chronicle*, which adds that the whole Welsh people came to him, implies that they were followed by the less important rulers of the country nearer England.¹³²

Crucially, the chronicler makes no mention of any military action against these rulers, so one might posit that these were voluntary submissions along the lines of those described by Asser. We are given some clues, however, by the submission formula which the chronicler applies to the Welsh kings, the idea that they had 'sought' or 'chosen' Edward as their lord. As discussed above, this formula was more often applied to the submissions of various army groups and burghs during Edward's Southumbrian conquests.¹³³ It does, however, seem to be a minimal expression of submission, and its terms would, necessarily, have been far different from those which Edward demanded in his conquests. It would certainly be absurd to apply Abels arguments, and suggest that the Welsh kings were required to effectively sign over their kingdoms.¹³⁴ It is possible, as well, that there was not any submission at all, as there is no shred of supporting evidence, such as that of the military assistance provided to Alfred in 893. It is, however, tempting to consider, as Wendy Davies put it, 'a period of Welsh "submission" to English kings [which] lasted essentially from the 880s to the 950.'¹³⁵ If one accepts this narrative, then the 'submission' might merely be a confirmation of relationships, first entered into during Alfred's reign, which had been carried on under the rule of Æthelred and Æthelflæd in Mercia. In this scenario, Æthelflæd's death would

¹³²Stenton, *Angl-Saxon England*, 330.

¹³³ASC 914; ASC A 917, ASC A 918; see above 52-5.

¹³⁴See above, 54-5.

¹³⁵Davies, *Patterns of Power*, 75.

have prompted, as a matter of course, a renewal of the relationship by her political successor, Edward. Ultimately however, it may be wisest to view this 'submission' as one which cannot be proven, or indeed disproven by the evidence, but remains a strong possibility, although we can likely find a context for the meeting in the desire of all involved to have their spheres of influence recognized.

This 'submission' and that of the northern kings in 920, are generally regarded as precedents to the undoubted authority which, as discussed below, Æthelstan enjoyed over Wales and the northern half of Britain. The evidence for the 920 'submission' is, as well, extremely thin, as later chroniclers added no new information to the evidence of the Parker chronicle except their own interpretations.¹³⁶ In contrast to the Welsh 'submissions', which have received only passing comment, the submission of 920 has attracted comment from many historians, and was the subject of an article in the middle of the last century.¹³⁷ Despite the chronology established by Angus over a half-century ago, apparently dislocated entries in the Parker Chronicle have produced confusion over the date of this event, occasionally given as 921, 923 or 924.¹³⁸ Janet Bately's edition has established, however, that these are misdatings which resulted from unhelpful, later addition of minims to an initially correct date of 920, and her conclusion has been supported by David Dumville.¹³⁹ The text reads:

7 for þa þonan on Peaclond to Badecanwiellon 7 het gewyrcean ane burg þær
on neaweste 7 gemannian, 7 hine geces þa to fæder 7 to hlaforde Scotta cyning
7 eall Scotta þeod, 7 Rægnald 7 Eadulfes suna 7 ealle þa þe on Norphymbrum

¹³⁶William of Malmesbury, *GRA* §125 claimed generally, for example, that after Æthelred of Mercia's death, Edward 'mox Occidentales et Orientales Anglos et Northanimbro qui cum Danis iam in unam gentem coaluerunt, et Scottos qui aquilonalem insulae partem inhabitant, et Britones omnes, quos nos Walenses dicimus, bellis profligatos suae ditioni subegerit, nec umquam in aliqua pugna humiliorem manum habuerit.' Then he defeated in battle and subjected the West and East Angles and the Northumbrians, who had already grown into one nation with the Danes, the Scots who dwell in the northern part of the island, and the Britons (whom we call Welsh); nor did he himself ever come off second best in any contest.'

¹³⁷F. T. Wainwright, 'The submission to Edward the Elder', *History* 37 (1952) 114-30.

¹³⁸W. S. Angus, 'The chronology of the reign of Edward the Elder', *English Historical Review* 53 (1938) 194-210.

¹³⁹Janet Bately, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 3, MS A. (Cambridge, 1986) lviii, 69; David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edward* (Woodbridge, 1992), 99-102.

bugeaþ, ægþer ge Englisce ge Denisce ge Norþmen ge oþre, 7 eac
Stræcledweala cyning 7 ealle Stræcledwealas.¹⁴⁰

As with the 'submission' of the Welsh kings, this statement in a generally reliable, and at least near-contemporary source, that some sort of submission took place in 920, has resulted in a general historical consensus which Stenton, once again, represents well. 'To Edward himself the submission meant that each ruler who became his man promised to respect his territory and to attack his enemies.'¹⁴¹ Unlike in the Welsh case, a number of scholars have challenged this consensus. F. T. Wainwright was the first scholar this century to provide a serious alternative, and claimed that 'The "submission" was fundamentally no more than an anti-Norse coalition.'¹⁴² More recently, Alfred Smyth put forward some very good arguments against the 'submission' interpretation, but unfortunately in a book which received poor reviews, although they were not quite as severe as those of his *Alfred* book.¹⁴³ The most telling criticism, however, has come from Pauline Stafford, who noted that 'The kings of Scots might well have described this alliance sealed on the Pennine borders of York and Mercia in other ways', and argued that the business of the meeting was essentially a settling of the political landscape in Britain.¹⁴⁴

As with that of the Welsh kings, the specific context of the 'submission' is not immediately apparent. Generations of historians from the twelfth century to the twentieth have, however, regarded this meeting as the opening round of medieval 'Anglo-Scottish' relations. Although it is anachronistic to be talking about either 'England' or 'Scotland' in 920, this approach suited scholars from the outset, as twelfth-

¹⁴⁰ASC A 920. Then he [Edward] went from there into the Peak district to Bakewell and ordered a borough to be built in the neighbourhood and manned. And then the king of the Scots and all the people of the Scots, and Ragnald, and the sons of Eadwulf and all who live in Northumbria, both English and Danish, Norsemen and others, and also the king of the Strathclyde Welsh and all the Strathclyde Welsh, chose him as father and lord.

¹⁴¹Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 334.

¹⁴²Wainwright, 'The submission', 127.

¹⁴³Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London, 1984), 199-200. For a review article see W. David H. Sellar, 'Warlords, Holy Men and Matrilineal Succession', *Innes Review* 36 (1985) 29-43.

¹⁴⁴Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 33.

century chroniclers could find in this meeting, among others, a clear precedent and justification for the attempted subordination of kings of Scots along 'feudal' lines. It was this issue which exercised the minds of historians well into this century, and Stenton could note wryly that the obligations of the 920 meeting, 'no more than dimly foreshadow the elaborate feudal relationship which many medieval, and some later, historians have read into them.'¹⁴⁵ The main pitfall of the approach, however, is that the resulting debate has too often proceeded along parochial, national lines. Even very recently Benjamin Hudson, representing the Scottish side of the argument, reiterated arguments against the historicity of the event, first put forward by E. W. Robertson, which have been subsequently shown to be erroneous.¹⁴⁶ Hudson highlighted Robertson's point that Ragnald, who died in 921, 'could not have been a participant in a treaty made in 924.'¹⁴⁷ This argument falters when one realizes, as noted above, that Bately's 1986 edition established that later scribal 'corrections' changed the date of the entry from 920 to 924. If, however, one wished to take an excessively negative approach to the evidence, they could argue that there was in fact no meeting of any sort, as our source does not explicitly state this. The *Chronicle*, does, however, imply collective dealings with Edward, even if the conventional assumption, unstated by the *Chronicle*, that the meeting took place at Bakewell is not taken on board. Yet Bakewell, close to the border between Northumbria and Mercia, would be a reasonable location for the motley collection of kings mentioned in the *Chronicle* to meet, although the diverse personnel involved underscore the point that one must move beyond a mere consideration of 'Anglo-Scottish relations' to provide the best interpretation.

Wainwright's alternative interpretation, that the meeting represented an anti-Norse alliance, falls into the context of the generally accepted idea that kings in Britain united in common cause against Scandinavian invaders. In the arena of Anglo-Welsh relations, Henry Loyn described this 'standard orthodox doctrine' as 'a realisation that

¹⁴⁵Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 334.

¹⁴⁶E. W. Robertson, *Scotland under her Early Kings*, i, 69.

¹⁴⁷Benjamin T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (London, 1994), 73.

under pressure of common Viking attack the Christian communities on both sides of the linguistic frontier, English and Welsh, were drawn together into a sometimes precarious alliance'.¹⁴⁸ Pauline Stafford noted more generally, and with later qualification, that 'By c. AD 900 a century of Viking raiding had produced a sense of common purpose among the rulers surrounding the North Sea and English Channel'.¹⁴⁹ As attractive as this argument for unity might appear to historians of the generation of F. T. Wainwright or Henry Loyn who witnessed the grand Atlantic alliance in World War II, the evidence for this alliance is, however, quite thin.

It must be said that there is in some cases good evidence for alliance against Scandinavians, but there are also spectacular examples of alliances with Scandinavians, such as that of Æthelwold, and the extraordinary coalition defeated by Æthelstan at Brunanburh. In total, from the reign of Alfred to the end of the tenth century, there are at least sixteen cases of military alliance in Britain mentioned in contemporary, near-contemporary, or later sources which do not arouse suspicion. These cases are almost equally balanced between those involving alliances with Scandinavians, those involving alliances against Scandinavians, and those not involving Scandinavians at all. To briefly survey the evidence, alliances with Scandinavians were made by Anarawd ap Rhodri and Æthelwold, by Constantín of Alba in the Brunanburh coalition, and finally by the Welsh dynasts Custennin ap Iago and Maredudd ab Owain in 980 and 992 respectively.¹⁵⁰ The strongest Anti-Scandinavian alliance were those made between Alfred and Edward, and Æthelred and Æthelflaed.¹⁵¹ Others include the Welsh assistance at Buttington in 893, the cooperation against Ragnald by Constantín of Alba and northern English rulers in the 910s, and the defeated alliance of 'Scots, Britons, and Saxons' noted by the *Annals of Ulster* in 952.¹⁵² Alliances which do not involve

¹⁴⁸Henry Loyn, 'Wales and England in the Tenth Century: the Context of the Athelstan Charters', *Welsh History Review* 10 (1980-1) 283.

¹⁴⁹Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 114.

¹⁵⁰Stevenson, *Asser*, 66; *ASC* 900, *ASC* 937; *ByT* 980; *ByT* 992.

¹⁵¹*ASC* 893, *ASC* 909; *ASC* 910.

¹⁵²*ASC* 893; *HSC* §22; *AU* 952.2.

Scandinavians at all are the most numerous. Anarawd was assisted by 'Angli' in 894 campaign in Wales, Welsh kings participated in Æthelstan's campaign against Constantín in 934, and Edmund is reported to have receive the assistance of a King of Dyfed in 945.¹⁵³ William of Malmesbury tells us that King Edward had died a few days after suppressing a revolt of the men of Chester, who had been assisted by 'Britones', and finally, English involvement in internecine dynastic conflicts in Wales is noted in 978, 983, and 992.¹⁵⁴ It does not seem, then, that the idea that anti-Scandinavian alliances were the order of the day can be accepted, and the lack of unity amongst the Scandinavians must be stressed as well. One is led, instead, to conclusions similar to those reached by Jinty Nelson with respect to the Continent, that rulers often fought against Scandinavians, but were equally willing to employ them, sometimes literally, for their own ends.¹⁵⁵

Shorn of the general anti-Scandinavian thesis, Wainwright's arguments regarding the 920 meeting begin to fray. One is immediately faced with the problem that Ragnald, the powerful 'ri Finngall 7 Dubgall', is found involved in a purported 'anti-Norse' coalition, but there are deeper flaws.¹⁵⁶ The ultimate kernel for the argument comes from late eleventh- or twelfth-century Irish saga material regarding Æthelflæd, who seems to have very much captured the imagination of her neighbours across the Irish Sea. The so-called *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* relate that:

Do rigne Edeldrída tríá na gliocas féin sidh fria Fíora Alban, 7 re Breathnuibh, gibé tan tiugfáidís an cineadh cédna da h-ionsoighidh-si, gur ro eirghidis sin do congnamh lé. Damadh chuca-somh nó tháosdaois, gur ro eirgeadh-si leo-sumh.¹⁵⁷

Aside from its late date, the main problem in accepting this statement is that Irish writers of the eleventh and twelfth century, most famously in the heavily spin-doctored

¹⁵³AC 894; S 407; S 425; EHD 257.

¹⁵⁴GRA §133; ByT 978; ByT 983, ByT 992.

¹⁵⁵Nelson, *Charles*, 204-6. ByT 992 notes that Maredudd 'hired' Gentiles.

¹⁵⁶AU 921.4. 'King of the fair foreigners and the dark foreigners.'

¹⁵⁷Joan Newlon Radner, *Fragmentary Annals*, 180. 'Aethelflaed, through her own cleverness, made peace with the men of Alba and with the Britons, so that whenever the same race [the heathens] should come to attack her, they would rise to help her. If it were against them that they came, she would take arms with them'

Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib, were keen to portray selfless opposition to, or common alliance against Scandinavian invaders.¹⁵⁸ When it is considered that contemporary Irish sources note many instances of alliance with Scandinavians, with the *Annals of Ulster* recording at least ten in the tenth century alone, one cannot accept statements in later Irish sources which portray alliance against Scandinavians in the absence of support from contemporary sources.¹⁵⁹ A near-contemporary source in fact contradicts the account in the Fragmentary Annals on two points, since the *Mercian Register* indicates that Æthelflæd both sent an army against Brycheiniog in 916, and entered into some sort of alliance with the men of York, who were likely Danes, in 918.¹⁶⁰ So when this very shaky foundation is taken into account, the rest of Wainwright's argument, that Æthelflæd led the purported alliance even though the *Fragmentary Annals* merely state that she instigated it, and that the purpose of the meeting in 920 was for Edward to assume formal leadership of this alliance, fails to convince.

Once Wainwright's arguments are discarded, one must inevitably return to the source itself, the Parker chronicle, and apply some basic internal criticism. In recent generations several historians, most notably Michael Wallace-Hadrill, Peter Sawyer, and R. H. C. Davis have argued that the ninth and early tenth century portions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* essentially represent 'dynastic propaganda' intended to give greater authority to West Saxon rulers.¹⁶¹ Very recently, both Sarah Foot and Simon Keynes have taken issue, and Keynes in particular has offered elegant criticism of the view that the *Chronicle* is 'a fundamentally West Saxon work, celebrating the

¹⁵⁸For a recent study of the 'War of the Gael with the Foreigner' see Maire Ní Mhaonaigh, M. 'Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib: some dating considerations', *Peritia* 9 (1995) 354-77.

¹⁵⁹AU 928.5; AU 933.3; AU 947.1; AU 953.1; AU 956.3; AU 968.3; AU 970.3; AU 970.4; AU 983.2; AU 995.2.

¹⁶⁰MR 916; MR 918.

¹⁶¹R. H. C. Davis, 'Alfred the Great: propaganda and truth', *History* 56 (1971) 169-82; P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, 2nd ed. (London, 1971), 20; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Franks and the English in the ninth century: some common historical interests', in Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), 209-11.

achievements of the West Saxon dynasty at the expense of their rivals'.¹⁶²

'Propaganda' is almost certainly a misleading word to apply, as one sees nothing in early medieval Britain akin to the systematic distortion of information for which there are sad contemporary examples. This said, one must acknowledge the parochial interest and West Saxon perspective of the *Chronicle*, and at the risk of replacing one anachronism with another, one might say that Alfred and Edward possessed skilled 'spin-doctors.' Crucially for the issue at hand, this 'spin-doctoring' is particularly evident in those entries, from 915 to 920, which are peculiar to the Parker Chronicle, and this section of the chronicle deserves to be treated, and criticized, as a text in itself.¹⁶³ Invariably, the entries begin with the formula, 'In this year, at X time king Edward did Y', and go on to relate an extraordinary narrative of burgh building and military success. The entries from 915 to 920 do not so much comprise part of an *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as a 'Chronicle of the Triumphs of Edward.' Granted, the chronicler had much to celebrate, but in doing so maintained an ideology of silence regarding other important developments which must be reconstructed through a patchwork of Irish, Mercian, and Welsh annals, and Cuthbertine narrative sources. Historians have, therefore, been remiss in employing, as is customary, the *Chronicle* as the fundamental narrative, as it may ultimately produce distorted interpretations.

As David Dumville has commented, the text of the Parker Chronicle from 893 to 920 'has been augmented (and altered) by someone with West Saxon and perhaps Hampshire leanings.'¹⁶⁴ The author of the text from 915 to 920 displays a similar perspective, although the question of the intended audience for this section of the *Chronicle* is also crucial. While court consumption was likely the prime factor, it is possible that it was also written with an eye to the Mercians. As discussed above, it is

¹⁶²Keynes, 'King Alfred', 40; Sarah Foot, 'The Making of *Anglecynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 6 (1996) 35-6.

¹⁶³Keynes and Lapidge, 278-80 note the crucial distinction between the 'common stock' of the *Chronicle*, and later continuations, which must be criticized separately. Keynes's comments in 'King Alfred' apply only to the 'common stock.'

¹⁶⁴Dumville, *Wessex*, 70.

unlikely that the ideology of Alfred and Edward's 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' was successful in effectively absorbing the Mercian polity, but this absorption required, instead, a murky political coup.¹⁶⁵ It is perhaps in the aftermath of this coup that the context of the composition of the Parker Chronicle entries from 915-920 should be found. While Wallace-Hadrill's comment that the *Chronicle* was 'a reflection of urgent political need not of a people, but a dynasty' may be somewhat off the mark, one can credibly argue that the 'Chronicle of the Triumphs of Edward' reflected Edward's political needs.¹⁶⁶ The chronicler's intent may have been to win over those Mercians either unamused by Edward's actions, or unconvinced by the wisdom of the new political community in the first place, to the idea that Edward's rule was, in fact, a 'good thing', as evidenced by his spectacularly successful Southumbrian conquests. As discussed above the 'submission', as the chronicler saw it, of the Welsh kings, longstanding enemies of the Mercians, in 918 added further icing to the cake. Finally, the chronicler could conclude the account with a triumphant record of Edward's diplomacy involving the northern kings.

It may be controversial to write 'northern kings', as one will note that regal title is withheld from Ragnald and the sons of Eadwulf. There has been no real debate on the regal status of Ragnald, as he was called a king by both Irish annals and the D and E manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.¹⁶⁷ It has been customary, however, taking a cue both from this entry and another in the D manuscript of the *Chronicle* for 927, to deny regal status to the rulers of the northern half of a Northumbria which had been fractured by the conquest of York in 867.¹⁶⁸ Simon Keynes recently hedged his bets by calling them rulers rather than kings, but the various sources available are almost unanimous in referring to them as kings.¹⁶⁹ The Northumbrian annals in the

¹⁶⁵See above, 51-2.

¹⁶⁶Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Franks and the English', 211.

¹⁶⁷AU 921.4; ASC DE 923 [recte 919].

¹⁶⁸ASC D 926 [recte 927].

¹⁶⁹Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes and Donald Scragg, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1999) 504-5.

Historia Regum attributed to Symeon of Durham record three kings, Ecgbert, Ricsige, and another Ecgbert who ruled the 'Northumbros ultra Tine', the 'Northumbrians beyond the Tyne' from 867 until after 876.¹⁷⁰ English sources are silent on their status after this, but in both 913 and 934, Irish annals record the obituaries of 'kings of the north Saxons' who can be associated with those who met Edward in 920 and Æthelstan in 927.¹⁷¹ As discussed above, one should not be suspicious of the evidence of Irish annals if they called someone in Britain a king, as they would not have likely gone to the trouble of recording the obituaries of the northern English rulers if they were not kings of some note. The sticking point for the chronicler with regard to the sons of Eadwulf may have been that the idea of an 'English' king other than Edward was unpalatable, or could not be countenanced, but it illustrates the 'spin' in the account, and raises further doubts about its credibility.

As with the account of the 'submission' of the Welsh kings, we are also faced with the 'choosing as lord' submission phrase, which, although a minimalist statement, is possibly suspect in the context of foreign relations. The best Edward could hope for in a submission between kings is an acknowledgement of his superiority and the imposition of tributary status. As with the Welsh kings, the Chronicler may have been representing unfamiliar relationships in familiar terms, and one might view his claims that virtually every person living north of the Humber 'accepted Edward as lord' not so much as a flight of fancy, or a statement of fact, but rather misinformed, or speculative interpretation. To explain away the testimony of our only source may appear as an unduly negative approach, but we are lacking any supporting evidence for its testimony. In contrast, as will be discussed in greater detail below, there is ample corroboration for the chronicler's claim that in 927 'ealle þa cyngas þa on þyssum iglande wæron he

¹⁷⁰HRA C 867; HRA C 873; HRA C 876.

¹⁷¹AU 913.1; Denis Murphy, ed., *The Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Dublin, 1896) sub anno 904 [recte 913]; 928 [recte 934]. One could argue that the use of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, a very late set of annals translated from Irish into English, is inappropriate in this context. One must make a distinction, however, between annals which could have been manipulated, and those which record 'matter-of-fact' information. It seems likely that annals similar to that in AU 913.1, which records the death of 'Etulbb ri Saxan Tuaiscirt', underlie the translated obituaries in *AClon*, which report the deaths of 'kings of North Saxons.'

[Æthelstan] gewylde.¹⁷² Literary evidence suggests that Welsh kings paid tribute in this period, and also provides direct corroboration for the submission of Constantín king of Alba.¹⁷³ In charters one can follow the subscriptions of various *subreguli*, while some coins from this period advertise Æthelstan's status as 'rex totius Britanniae'.¹⁷⁴ The royal style in some of Æthelstan's charters from this period also reflects his new won authority, as he claims himself to be 'king of the English, raised by the right hand of the Almighty to the throne of the whole kingdom of Britain'.¹⁷⁵ Any such supporting evidence is absent in the case of the supposed submission to Edward in 920, although one must question whether absence of evidence is evidence of absence in this case. One is not only extremely poorly served by narrative evidence after 920, but there are no extant charters from Edward's reign after 909. This lack of evidence means that it is not possible to prove the negative, that there was no submission in 920, but the evidence does suggest that there are more satisfactory interpretations.

This becomes evident if one takes a broader view of both political developments in Britain during Edward's reign, and the phenomenon of royal gatherings in the Insular World. As discussed above, comparative Irish evidence sheds some light, as there were similar meetings in Ireland in 737, 784, 827, 838, 851, 859, and 997.¹⁷⁶ Submissions sometimes did occur at these meetings, but this cannot be taken as a given, and the evidence suggests that steps were sometimes taken to ensure that participants appeared as equals. One would expect that diplomacy in tenth-century Britain was similarly ritualized, but the evidence is not full enough to allow the issue to be explored in more than a cursory manner. As discussed below, terms such as *midwyrhta*, 'together-worker', and *efenwyrhtan*, 'even-workers', which appear in

¹⁷²ASC D 926 [recte 927]. 'Brought under his rule all the kings that were in this island.'

¹⁷³Ifor Williams, ed., *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain* (Dublin, 1972), 2-3, 6-11; Michael Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems as evidence for the reign of Athelstan', *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981) 98.

¹⁷⁴Loyn, 'Wales and England', 292-5; C. E. Blunt, 'The coinage of Athelstan, 924-39. A survey', *British Numismatic Journal* 42 (1973) 46-51.

¹⁷⁵S 416.

¹⁷⁶AU 737.9; AU 784.8; AU 827.10; AU 838.6; AI 838; AU 851.5; AU 859.3; AI 997.2. See above, 25-7.

accounts of diplomacy later in the century do, however, advertise equal relationships.¹⁷⁷ If these examples are set alongside that of Æthelstan, it is clear that no unitary interpretation presents itself, and neither submission nor lack thereof can be assumed. In the case of the 'submission' of 920, then, one must adopt the approach, but not the conclusions of Wainwright, and ultimately turn to its specific political context.

Clearly, everything was happening in the years before 920. At the same time that Edward was embarking on his conquests and effecting, as I see it, a forcible annexation of Mercia, the Scandinavian king Ragnald was engaged in an ultimately successful attempt to carve out a kingdom in Britain for himself. He was very active militarily in northern Britain, and fought at least three battles close to the river Tyne between 913 and 921, as related in the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*.¹⁷⁸ Interestingly, the *Historia* presents evidence that, on at least one occasion, Constantín king of Alba, was allied with Aldred and Ucthred, the 'sons of Eadwulf' as the chronicler notes, in a disastrous battle against Ragnald.¹⁷⁹ The most spectacular of Ragnald's battles occurred in 918, against the forces of Constantín king of Alba. The lengthy account in the *Annals of Ulster* seems to indicate that Constantín had a slightly better day, as his forces killed two of Ragnald's lieutenants and made 'a very great slaughter of the heathens', while Ragnald had to settle for a mere 'slaughter' of Constantín's men.¹⁸⁰ Ragnald was able to recover by the next year, when he conquered York, a success which can only have added fuel to an already volatile situation, considering the southern expansion of Constantín's authority and Edward's conquests.¹⁸¹ So when the meeting in 920 is assessed, one should keep it in mind that

¹⁷⁷ASC 945; ASC DE 973.

¹⁷⁸AU 918.4; HSC §22; §24. Ted Johnson South, *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of His Patrimony*, 105-7, argues that these were in fact all the same battle, but does not take mutually exclusive details into account.

¹⁷⁹HSC §22.

¹⁸⁰AU 918.4.

¹⁸¹ASC DE 923 [recte 919]. 'Her Regnold cyning gewan Eoforwic.' For further discussion of Ragnald see Lesley Abrams, 'The Conversion of the Scandinavians of Dublin', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 20 (1998), 22, where she correctly notes, like others, the possibility that more than one Ragnald has been confounded.

the northern kings were a collection of past or current allies, and current, or at least very recent enemies who had faced each other in battle a mere two years earlier, and possibly still had axes to grind. One can say little about the final participant in the meeting, the king of Strathclyde, although scattered pieces of evidence over the tenth and eleventh centuries are compatible with a loose degree of subordination under the king of Alba, in this case Constantín.¹⁸²

The situation faced by the political players in Britain was thus very complex, but it seems most probable that the historical context of the meeting in 920 was the two very recent conquests, those of Edward in Southumbrian lands and of Ragnald in York. These conquests were crucial milestones in developments which, over the previous half-century, had completely re-drawn the political map in Britain. Both Edward and Ragnald, and Constantín as well would have wanted the at least tacit acknowledgement, by other kings in Britain, of their new spheres of influence. Another strong possibility that must be countenanced is that there was peace-making involved, with the prime candidates for this activity being Ragnald and Constantín. It should be recalled that it was only seventeen years later that Constantín was fighting alongside Ragnald's successor against Æthelstan at Brunanburh. Any conclusions regarding this meeting are, however, merely of the 'best guess' variety, for in this, as in so many other questions of early medieval history, there is not enough evidence to reach a completely satisfactory answer. The idea that this meeting represented a 'submission', while it must remain a possibility, does however seem unlikely. The textual context of the chronicler's passage makes his interpretation of the meeting suspect, and ultimately, Edward was in no position to force the subordination of, or dictate terms to his fellow kings in Britain in 920. As we will see, Edward's son Æthelstan was, however, able to effect this spectacular, but fleeting, achievement a mere seven years later.

¹⁸²See below, 129-30, for further discussion. Stephen T. Driscoll, 'Church archaeology in Glasgow and the Kingdom of Strathclyde', *Innes Review* 49 (1998) 114, warns, however, that 'Judging from the archaeological evidence at Govan, we would be wrong to imagine that Strathclyde was the lapdog of the king of Scots.'

The submissions, and non-submissions discussed in this chapter thus illustrate quite well both the difficulty of coming to firm conclusions with imperfect sources, and the great variety of relationships which are described as 'submissions.' The Welsh kings were only minimally submissive to Alfred; they may have been required to provide military service, but, if we can believe half of what Asser said, the benefits they received from acknowledging Alfred's authority outweighed the costs. The same cannot be said for those who submitted to Edward during the course of his successful Southumbrian conquest. If the brief period of independence from Æthelwulfing control which the Five Boroughs enjoyed after the death of Æthelstan is excepted, then the submissions which Edward had exacted resulted in a permanent expansion of his dynasty's *regnum*. The long-term 'quasi-regal' status of Æthelred and Æthelflæd provides another submission category. These rulers acknowledged the superior lordship of Alfred and Edward and surrendered some power, but maintained effective control over their territory and took opportunities to exert their own independence. The fact that it took the succession of two females, and a political coup by Edward for Mercia to lose its independent status illustrates their success. Finally, we are left with the most famous, but most poorly attested 'submissions.' Unfortunately, the evidence for these is so one-sided and scanty that we may never be provided with a satisfactory explanation.

Chapter III:

*Rex Anglorum per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Brytaniæ regni solio sublimatus*¹

The claims which Æthelstan makes in his charters, to rulership over all Britain, find an echo in the *Annals of Ulster*, which record that 'Adalastán, ri Saxan, cleithi n-ordain iartair domain, segura morte moritur.'² The full significance of this testament to Æthelstan's reputation only becomes clear when one considers that the same annals accord such high-sounding titles to only Charlemagne, 'rex Francorum, immo totius Europæ imperator', and Brian Boru, 'August iartair tuaiscirt Eorpa uile.'³ The striking epithet applied to Æthelstan merely, however, offers the historian a frustrating appetizer, as one cannot help but repeat the customary complaint that Æthelstan has not been well-served by the evidence left to us. As Michael Wood put it, 'in the nature of the evidence, Aethelstan is eclipsed by the glaring light of his grandfather [Alfred] and nephew [Edgar].'⁴ However, in the course of a recent, and convincing argument, that the developments of Æthelstan's reign should not be seen as a trough between the achievements of Alfred and Edgar, David Dumville noted, 'Yet the lack [of source-material] is in truth more apparent than real. . . . Robinson pointed the way to a wealth of scattered contemporary evidence, but of a sort very different from the historian's

¹S 416.

²AU 939.6. 'Aethelstan, king of the Saxons, pillar [literally 'centre-post'] of the dignity of the western world, died an untroubled death.' Connections between Æthelstan and Armagh, where the *Annals of Ulster* were likely written, are suggested by an inscription in London, Lambeth Palace MS 1370, a late ninth century gospel book written in Ireland, possibly at Armagh. It reads, 'Mæielbriðus mac Durnani istum textum per triquadrum Deo digne dogmatizat ast Aethelstanus Anglosæxana rex et rector Doruernensi metropoli dat per æuum'. 'Mael Brigitte mac Tornain propounds this gospel-book throughout the world, in a manner worthy of God; but Aethelstan, king and ruler of the Anglo-Saxons, gives it for ever to the metropolitan see of Canterbury'. For detailed discussion see Simon Keynes, 'King Aethelstan's Books', in Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss, eds., *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1985), 143-201, at 153-9. For Mael Brigitte's obituary see AU 927.1.

³AU 813.6. 'King of the Franks, or rather emperor of the whole of Europe'; AU 1014.2. 'Augustus of the whole of north-west Europe.'

⁴Michael Wood, 'The making of King Aethelstan's Empire: an English Charlemagne?', in Patrick Wormald, et al eds., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), 250-72, at 270.

usual diet.⁵ This source material, most importantly Æthelstan's charters, allows one to construct a convincing picture not of a 'First King of England', as Dumville argued, nor a 'King of Britain', as was claimed in contemporary charters, but rather of an 'Emperor of Britain' who spectacularly, but fleetingly, extended *imperium* over the entire island. The question of whether Æthelstan was an 'English Charlemagne' cannot, however, rest merely upon the evidence, set out by Wood, of the ideological and continental diplomatic evidence for Æthelstan's reign. The most crucial issue is how he interacted with his neighbours within, not without Britain.

Contemporary evidence, most importantly charter witness lists and literary evidence, and the arguably near-contemporary evidence of the D manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, provide skeletal evidence for these interactions. Controversy continues, however, over whether it can be fleshed out with evidence from Anglo-Norman chroniclers, most importantly William of Malmesbury (c. 1095 - c. 1143), who both incorporated versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* into their own works, and drew upon other sources which are now lost. One finds assessments of William's evidence which range from the naively trusting statement that 'Malmesbury was a good historian and even if some detail is suspect he seized the basic reality',⁶ to Dumville's negative chidings of most historians' 'recourse to the dangerous pages of William of Malmesbury'.⁷ Dorothy Whitelock stated the traditional orthodoxy on the value of William's testimony for Æthelstan's reign as follows:

William's account of this king is valuable mainly because of the nearly contemporary poem he came across as he was doing this part of his history, as he tells us himself. One can see from what is here given that, without it, he would have added only legendary matter to our knowledge.⁸

William stated:

⁵David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), 142-3, referring to J. A. Robinson, *The Times of Saint Dunstan* (Oxford, 1923).

⁶Henry Loyn, 'Wales and England in the Tenth Century: the Context of the Athelstan Charters', *Welsh History Review* 10 (1980-1) 288.

⁷Dumville, *Wessex*, 142.

⁸Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents*, vol. i (London, 1955), 277.

Quamquam litteras illum scisse pauci admodum dies sunt quod didicerim, in quodam sane uolumine uetusto. . . . Cuius hic uerba pro compendio subicerem, nisi quia ultra opinionem in laudibus principis uagatur, eo dicendi genere quod suffultum rex facundiae Romanae Tullius in rethoricis appellat. . . . Pauca igitur familiari stilo subnectam, quae uideantur aliquod conferre emolumentum ad dignitatis eius documentum.⁹

Michael Lapidge challenged the traditional assumptions regarding the material, noting that 'Scholars have not adverted carefully enough to the force of William's subjunctive *subiicerem*: he *would* have added some words from the "obviously ancient book" if they had not been expressed in such bombastic language.'¹⁰ Wood soon offered a defence of the traditional views, pointing out that William later wrote that '*tempus est ut illius uersifici, de quo omnia haec excerptimus, sententiam ponamus*'.¹¹ As Wood has established in as yet unpublished work, this statement, and other aspects of the account, suggest that it is most probable that William was employing a lost tenth-century source for his section on Æthelstan.¹² Yet while historians can be happy that the account has been rehabilitated, this does not, however, give one license to employ the evidence uncritically, as William was never one to remain a slave to his sources. If one keeps this in mind, and the fact that the evidence has already been interpreted twice, once by the original author and another time by William, then his testimony can be used cautiously.

William's account of Æthelstan's youth and succession provide important clues which not only support the arguments, presented above, on the less than perfect 'Anglo-Saxon' union of Mercia and Wessex, but make it clear that Æthelstan's ultimate

⁹GRA §132. 'Though it is only a very short time since I learnt the extent of his education, from an ancient volume. . . . I would add his words here in an abbreviated form, except that in the praises of his prince he rambles beyond reason, in the style which Cicero, king of Roman eloquence, calls in his *Rhetoric* 'bombastic'. . . . I will therefore subjoin a few points in ordinary language which may perhaps make some contribution to the evidence for his good qualities.'

¹⁰Michael Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems as evidence for the reign of Athelstan', *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981) 63.

¹¹GRA §135. 'This is the moment to set down the opinions of the versifier from whom all this has been extracted'; Wood, 'The Making of King Aethelstan's Empire', 265.

¹²Michael Wood, 'The wars of King Athelstan', (forthcoming). I heard an earlier version of this work at the Æthelstan conference at Manchester in 1996, and am indebted to Michael Wood for his comments in the resultant discussions. The argument leads on from the comment of Wood, 'The Making of King Aethelstan's Empire', 266ff, that William's poem 'was plainly based on detailed contemporary panegyric detail.' For more detailed discussion of this section of the *Gesta Regum*, see R. M. Thomson and Michael Winterbottom, *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. ii. (Oxford, 1999), 116-18 especially.

achievements were worlds away from what he might have expected upon his father's death in 924. William states that 'Post haec in curia filiae Ethelfledae et generi Etheredi educandum curauerat; ubi multo studio amatae et preclarissimi ducis ad omen regni altus.'¹³ While this could be a reference in hindsight to Æthelstan's ultimate throne, it is also possible that Æthelstan was being groomed to take over as king of Mercia.¹⁴ What is certain is that he was not intended to take over as king of Wessex following the death of his father. No chronicles explicitly state that Æthelstan's brother Ælfweard succeeded Edward; the fullest account of the events, in the *Mercian Register*, merely states that:

Her Eadweard cing gefor on Myrcum æt Fearndune, 7 Ælfweard his sunu swiþe hraþe þæs gefor on Oxnaforda, 7 heora lic licgað on Wintanceastre. 7 Æþelstan wæs of Myrcum gecoren to cinge 7 æt Cingestune gehalgod.¹⁵

Although it was left unmentioned in the narrative sources, there are, as David Dumville has shown, sources which confirm a short reign for Ælfweard.¹⁶ Controversy lingers, however, over whether the *Mercian Register's* statement that the Mercians chose Æthelstan as king created, for a period, a separate kingship of Mercia.¹⁷ Whatever the truth of the matter, the fact that Æthelstan's coronation at Kingston was deferred until 4 September of the next year seems to indicate that there was, for whatever reason, opposition to his succession in Wessex, and at Winchester in particular.¹⁸ For what it is worth, and the author himself cast doubt on the veracity of the story, William of Malmesbury recorded a story that Æthelstan was the illegitimate son of a shepherd's

¹³GRA §133. 'After that, he [Alfred] arranged for the boy's education at the court of his daughter Æthelflæd and Æthelred his son-in-law, where he was brought up with great care by his aunt and the eminent ealdorman for the throne that seemed to await him.'

¹⁴As suggested in Barbara Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the Politics of the Tenth Century', in Yorke, ed., *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (Woodbridge, 1988), 65-88, at 71.

¹⁵MR 924. 'In this year King Edward died at Farndon in Mercia, and his son Ælfweard died very soon after at Oxford, and their bodies are buried at Winchester. And Athelstan was chosen by the Mercians as king, and consecrated at Kingston.'

¹⁶See David N. Dumville, 'The West Saxon Genealogical Regnal List: manuscripts and texts', *Anglia* 104 (1986) 1-32, at 29; Dumville, *Wessex*, 146.

¹⁷Keynes, 'King Athelstan's books', 187ff leaves the possibility open, while Dumville, *Wessex*, 93ff comments that 'this seems to me to be an unnecessary, and even potentially misleading, theory.'

¹⁸Yorke, 'Æthelwold', 69; *S* 394.

daughter with whom Edward slept while passing through her village.¹⁹ Whether it was illegitimacy, or another reason which made Æthelstan an unattractive candidate for the throne, William records other information, although it comes in the form of a speech put into Æthelstan's mouth, which relates the opposition of a certain Alfred to his succession. Æthelstan recalls the death of this Alfred, 'que nostrae felicitati et uitae emulus extitit nequitiae inimicorum nostrorum consentiens, quando me uoluerunt patre meo defuncto cecare in ciuitate Wintonia, si non me Deus sua pietate eripuisset.'²⁰ Needless to say, had this attempt been successful it would have scuppered Æthelstan's career, and one can only speculate on whether the 'foreign policy' of his competitors would have produced results so spectacular.

Æthelstan, probably unknowingly, set out on his path to success in 926, when 'Æpelstan cyning 7 Sihtric Norðhymbra cyng heo gesamnodon æt Tameweorðþige .iii. kalendas Februarius, 7 Æpelstan his sweostor him forgeaf.'²¹ This incident must be considered not only within the context of the marriage of another of Æthelstan's sisters in the previous year, but the wider network of European marriage connections which he was constructing.²² William of Malmesbury provides the most detail on this, and confirms that Æthelstan's brothers-in-law included Otto I, Charles the Simple, Louis of Aquitaine, and Hugh Duke of the Franks.²³ Although the chronology of some of these marriages is uncertain, Flodoard of Reims (c. 893-966) notes that in 926, 'Hugo, filius Rotberti, filiam Eadwardi regis Anglorum, sororem conjugis Karoli, duxit uxorem',

¹⁹GRA §139. Yorke, 'Æthelwold', 69, notes furthermore that Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim 'contrasted the union [of Edward with Athelstan's mother] unfavourably with that of Edward and his second wife, Ælflæd.' While this is near-contemporary testimony, Otto I married a daughter of Ælflæd, so Hrotsvitha must be viewed as a partisan commentator.

²⁰GRA §137. 'Who was always jealous of my prosperity and of my life and was party to the wickedness of my enemies when they tried after my father's death to blind me in the city of Winchester, though God in His mercy preserved me.'

²¹ASC D 925 [recte 926]. 'King Athelstan and Sihtric, king of the Northumbrians, met together at Tamworth on 30 January and Athelstan gave him his sister in marriage.'

²²MR 925. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 199, notes that the extra comment in MS D, but not B or C, that he sent her 'Ofsæ Ealdseaxna cynges suna', 'over the sea to the son of the king of the Old Saxons', is 'probably only a guess.' If so, it is, however, an accurate guess.

²³GRA §112; §126; §135. As noted by Thomson and Winterbottom, 109, the sources for some details which William provides are unknown, but he certainly used the prologue to the *Chronicle of Æthelweard*. A. Campbell, ed., *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962), 2.

which establishes that Sihtric's marriage would have immediately connected him with some of the most important European nobility and royalty.²⁴ This marriage instigated an alliance with the most significant power on Æthelstan's immediate border, and cannot be dismissed as a mere hiccup in a continuing crescendo of Æthelwulfing power. Sihtric's predecessor Ragnald had, as discussed above, been among the kings who met Edward the Elder in 920. The fact that Sihtric was, without major incident, able to 'win' York in 921 following Ragnald's death casts further doubt, however, on the idea that Edward was in a position to force a 'submission.'²⁵ Sihtric had been in power for five years before the marriage alliance, and was also, unlike Ragnald recognized as 'Norðhymbra cyng', so Æthelstan clearly could not have realistically hoped to gain any short-term territorial advantage, but perhaps intended to find a long-term solution to the problem of his northern border.²⁶ A precedent which may, however, have come to mind, was the marriage of Æthelflæd to Æthelred, which not only reinforced cooperation between Mercia and Wessex, but ultimately, while not inevitably, culminated in Edward's annexation of Mercian rule.

Whatever the intentions of the alliance, they were soon obsolete, as it is recorded in the next year that 'Oðeowdon fyrena leoman on norðdæle þære lyfte. 7 Sihtric acwæl, 7 Æpelstan cyning feng to Norðhymbra rice.'²⁷ The reporting of this incident illustrates once again the partisanship of West Saxon sources, as it implies a peaceful transfer of power to Æthelstan. Other sources paint a different picture. The *Annals of Ulster* report that in the same year Gothfrith, Sihtric's apparent successor,

²⁴Philippe Lauer, ed., *Les Annales de Flodoard* (Paris, 1905), 36; *EHD* 316, 'Hugh, son of Robert, married the daughter of Edward, king of the English, Charles's wife's sister.'

²⁵*ASC* DE 923 [recte 921]; *AU* 921.4. See also *AU* 920.5.

²⁶Lesley Abrams, 'The Conversion of the Scandinavians of Dublin', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 20 (1998) 22, suggests that this alliance may have 'required the Scandinavian leader to have been - or to have become - a Christian', but acknowledges that 'there is no contemporary reference to such a conversion.' In addition to being named as king in chronicles and annals, Sihtric also issued coins with a royal title, for which see Michael Dolley and C. N. Moore, 'Some Reflections on the English Coinages of Sihtric Cioch, King of Dublin and of York', *British Numismatic Journal* 43 (1973) 45-59.

²⁷*ASC* D 926 [recte 927]. 'Fiery lights appeared in the northern quarter of the sky, and Sihtric died, and King Athelstan succeeded to the kingdom of the Norhumbrians.' See also *AU* 927.2, which notes that Sihtric died at an 'inmatura ætate.' This should not be taken literally, but understood in the sense of 'untimely', as *AU* 917.3 establishes that he had been militarily active for at least ten years

abandoned Dublin and returned again after six months.²⁸ This proves nothing in itself, but certainly implies that Gothfrith was engaged in business elsewhere. The E Version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records, however, that 'Her Æpelstan cyning fordraf Guðfrið cyng', and the Northern annals in the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham note that 'Ethelstanus rex de regno Brittonum Gudfridum regem fugavit', which seems to indicate that Æthelstan pre-empted Gothfrith's succession, despite the lack of a clear claim to the throne.²⁹ William of Malmesbury unconvincingly interpreted Æthelstan's succession after the marriage of his sister and Sihtric as follows. 'Sed, ut predictum recolo, post annum uita deturbatus occasionem Ethelstano exhibuit ut Northanimbriam suae parti iungeret, quae sibi et antiquo iure et noua necessitudine competeret.'³⁰ The reference to a violent end is otherwise unattested, and William's 'antiquo iure' is of course fictional, unless one would posit that Æthelstan had a Northumbrian or Scandinavian mother. One might query, as well, whether Æthelstan would have claimed the realms of his other brothers-in-law had they died an untimely death. Æthelstan was, rather more practically, claiming Northumbria by 'right of conquest'; what is unfortunately absent is any reference to the 'submission' which must have occurred. In the section which does not take into account his 'ancient volume', William does, however, record the 'revolt' of an otherwise unattested 'Ealdwulf', possibly a member of the ruling family of Bamburgh, but it is not possible on the basis of this evidence to posit a third competitor for the Northumbrian throne.³¹

What has been traditionally viewed as far more significant than Æthelstan's conquest of Northumbria, was the 'submission' of his fellow kings in Britain later in the year. The famous passage reads:

²⁸AU 927.3.

²⁹ASC E 927. 'King Athelstan drove out King Guthfrith.' HRA C 927. 'King Athelstan put King Guthfrith to flight from the kingdom of the Britons.' If the statement in the *Historia Regum* is correct, Athelstan probably intercepted Gothfrith before he was able to reach York. For a discussion of the 'kingdom of the Britons' in question see below, 81.

³⁰GRA §134. But, as I remember having said before, a year later his [Sihtric's] life came to a violent end, and this gave Æthelstan the opportunity to add Northumbria to his own share, for it was his by ancient right no less than by modern connection.

³¹GRA §131. 'Prouintiam illam sibi subegit, expulso quodam Aldulfo qui rebellabat.'

7 ealle þa cyngas þe on þyssum iglande wæron he gewylde, ærest Huwal
 Westwala cyning, 7 Cosstantin Scotta cyning, 7 Uwen Wenta cyning, 7
 Ealdred Eadulfing from Bebbanbyrig, 7 mid wedde 7 mid apum fryþ
 gefæstnodon on þære stowe þe genemned is æt Eamotum on .iiii. idus Iulii, 7
 ælc deofolgeld tocwædon, 7 syþþam mid sibbe tocyrdon.³²

Some historians have, to varying degrees, questioned the evidence of this passage, as there are considerable inconsistencies within it. Benjamin Hudson, however, would completely dismiss the evidence of this passage because it is in the eleventh century D manuscript, which gives a date for the event 926, which would be impossible given the death of Sihtric the next year. He notes, furthermore, the complete absence of other reference to this event, including in the contemporary Parker manuscript.³³ There are, however, good reasons, to accept the testimony of the D manuscript. Many tenth-century sections of the various manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are misdated by several years, and the late date of the manuscript does not exclude the strong probability that this entry was recorded nearly contemporarily, although it certainly does increase the chance of chronological dislocation.³⁴

Hudson commented on the lack of a corresponding entry in the Parker Chronicle, that 'The absence in the Parker manuscript is particularly worrisome, because entries were being added to the text at the very time, or soon after, the meeting took place.'³⁵ As Bately notes, 'Hand 2' of the Parker Chronicle ends in the year 920, but there were later 'corrections' to the entries from 915 to 920 which resulted in this section being dislocated to 919 to 924.³⁶ 'Hand 3', although it begins with an entry for 924, is, however, written in 'Square minuscule typical of the 940s and 950s in general

³²ASC D 926 [recte 927]. And he brought under his rule [literally subjugated] all the kings who were in this island: first Hywel, king of the West Welsh, and Constantine, king of the Scots, and Owain, king of the people of Gwent, and Ealdred, son of Eadwulf from Bamburgh. And they established peace with pledge and oaths in the place which is called Eamont, on 12 July, and renounced all idolatry and afterwards departed in peace.

³³Benjamin T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (London, 1994), 74-5.

³⁴G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. vi., MS D (Cambridge, 1996), xxxi, suggests that this entry may have been part of the original Mercian Register.

³⁵Hudson, *Kings*, 75.

³⁶Janet Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. iii., MS A (Cambridge, 1986), lviii, 66-69.

and the charters of Eadred and Eadwig in particular.³⁷ It is likely, therefore, that, as a chronicle, the Parker Manuscript went entirely unutilized from shortly after 920, until it was updated over twenty years later.³⁸ It remains to ask whether one would expect to find an entry relating to events in 927 in this update, which has two main elements. First is a set of annals, beginning with Æthelstan's succession in 924, then jumping to his invasion of northern Britain in 933 [recte 934], common to the other *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* manuscripts which includes, among other things, the *Brunanburh* poem.³⁹ As the gap from 924-933 is also present in the B and C manuscripts, the absence of an entry for 927 in the Parker Manuscript is not a unique problem in light of the conclusion that it was not being updated contemporarily. It also contains four unique annals in the years 931-34, but these are all of parochial Winchester interest; if they had extended into the late 920s then one would not expect to find in them a statement of Æthelstan's foreign diplomatic success.⁴⁰ In short, it seems that there is no good reason to regard absence of evidence for a meeting in 927 in the Parker Chronicle as evidence of absence, rather we are lucky that the D manuscript contains a text which helps us fill what might otherwise be a historical black hole.

This said, the passage in the D manuscript was likely composed by a contemporary with a strong measure of ignorance for the kingdoms beyond Æthelstan's borders, or by a near-contemporary to whom the facts of the matter were not fresh. One wonders how credible it is that 'Huwal Westwala cyning', Hywel, then king of Dyfed, was meeting other kings in the Lake District, unless he came as part of Æthelstan's entourage. 'Uwen Wenta cyning' may be a misidentification, as there is no evidence for a contemporary king of the name in that region (which does not exclude the possibility that there was), but he can probably be identified as Owen of

³⁷Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xxxv.

³⁸Dumville, *Wessex*, 56, suggests that the third scribe was 'writing probably ca 950.' For further discussion of this section of the manuscript see Dumville, *Wessex*, 62-66.

³⁹Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xc-xci; Dumville, *Wessex*, 64.

⁴⁰Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xc-xci; Dumville, *Wessex*, 64.

Strathclyde.⁴¹ The chronicler also denied Ealdred of Bamburgh regal status which, as discussed above, he likely possessed. These problems do not, however, completely destroy the chronicler's credibility, but merely raise questions about the quality of his information. Later chroniclers are not completely helpful in clearing up any difficulties. Both William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester willfully or unwittingly misinterpreted their source to the point that Æthelstan was portrayed defeating the other British kings in battle, with them surrendering their kingdoms to him in the aftermath.⁴² William of Malmesbury may however, offer a solution to the problem of Hywel's presence *æt Eamotum*. Although he does not associate it with the events of 927, or any other year, he records that, 'Northwalensium, id est Britonum Aquilonalium, regulos apud Herefordensem urbem coegit occurrere, et aliquando calcitrantes in deditionem transire.'⁴³ It is possible, as well, to disassociate Hywel from the meeting in the north, as the chronicler notes that it was *ærest Huwal* that Æthelstan subjugated.⁴⁴ One could posit then, since, as previously noted, the *Historia Regum* notes that Gothfrith was put to flight 'from the kingdom of the Britons', that the submission at Hereford took place before or in the aftermath of this campaign. The chronicler, then, could have mistakenly associated Hywel's submissions with the others that occurred later in the year.

As was warned previously, chronicle evidence is a dangerously thin base upon which to support an argument for submissions. Literary evidence does, however, seem to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that what occurred *æt Eamotum* was a submission. Michael Lapidge has edited a poem entitled 'Carta Dirige Gressus', almost

⁴¹D. P. Kirby, 'Hywel Dda: Anglophil?', *Welsh History Review* 8 (1976-7) 3, suggests, however, that he was an 'Owain of Morgannwg.'

⁴²*GRA* §131; *JW* 926 [recte 927].

⁴³*GRA* §134. 'The princes of the Northwalians, that is, the Northern Britons, he compelled to meet him in the city of Hereford and, after a spell of reluctance, to change their minds and surrender.'

⁴⁴This also casts doubt on Kirby's suggested identification of Owen, as Owen appears in association with the two rulers who are certainly from northern Britain.

certainly composed in 927,⁴⁵ which celebrates the events of the year and relates the following in its fourth and fifth stanzas:

Ille, Sictric defuncto,
armat tum in prelio
Saxonum exercitum
per totum Bryttanium

Constantinus rex Scottorum
aduolat Bryttanium:
Saxonum regem saluando,
fidelis seruitio.

He, with Sictric having died,
In such circumstances arms for battle
the army of the English
throughout all Britain.

Constantine, king of the Scots,
hastens to Britain:
By supporting the king of the English
[he is] loyal in his service.⁴⁶

While the case for arguing away this piece of evidence as well is unconvincing,⁴⁷ Lapidge does err, however, in stating that after the death of Sihtric, 'Æthelstan was obliged to seek a new affirmation of his supremacy in the north.'⁴⁸ There is no indication that the marriage alliance which Sihtric and Æthelstan entered into entailed Sihtric's submission - this represented the *first* time that his power had been recognized, not only in Northumbria, but by the kings of northern Britain.⁴⁹ This is a point which is underlined by the lack of any other marriage alliances between Æthelwulfing princesses and kings based in Britain. Had Æthelstan followed this course he would have, as in the case of the continental marriages and that involving Sihtric, implicitly accepted them as equals, where it is clear that he was attempting subordination.

Gaining the 'submission' of the northern kings may not, however, have been the original intention of Æthelstan. William of Malmesbury notes that after Æthelstan took Northumbria:

Fugit tunc Analauus filius Sihtrici Hiberniam, et Godefridus frater eius Scottiam; subsecuti sunt e uestigio regales missi ad Constantinum regem Scottorum et Eugenium regem Cumbriorum transfugam cum denuntiatione belli repetentes. Nec fuit animus barbaris ut contra mutirent; quin potius sine retractatione, ad locum qui Dacor uocatur uenientes, se cum suis regnis

⁴⁵Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems', 92.

⁴⁶Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems', 98.

⁴⁷Hudson, *Kings*, 75.

⁴⁸Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems', 91.

⁴⁹One should note, as well, that traditional interpretations which portray Æthelstan's success in York as a 'reconquest', or a 'restoration of English authority', pre-suppose an unity which patently did not exist.

Anglorum regi dedidere. In cuius pacti gratia filium Constantini baptizari iussum ipse de sacro fonte suscepit.⁵⁰

A good deal of this is almost certainly Williams own editorial comment, such as his portrayal of the Scots and Cumbrians as 'barbarians', and the idea that Æthelstan needed to 'order' the baptism of the son of Constantín, a Christian king. Important grains of truth seem, however, to lay behind William's rhetoric. The 'Carta Dirige Gressus' poem notes that Æthelstan's army was active 'per totum Bryttaniam', and the pursuit of Gothfrith would seem a better explanation from Æthelstan's trip north than the idea that Æthelstan, as it were, simply decided to march on north with his army. It might also make more sense if the 'kingdom of the Britons' which the *Historia Regum* mentions that Æthelstan put Gothfrith to flight from was Strathclyde rather than a kingdom in Wales.⁵¹ Furthermore, since Constantín was possibly the leader of the northern kings, as is discussed below,⁵² this may have been why he was singled out for the subordinating honour of having Æthelstan stand as a godfather to his son. The *imperia* of the south and north had met, and at that moment it was Æthelstan who held the cards, most likely in the form of a more formidable army. William's comments on the reluctance of Constantín and Owen to resist may stem from this fact, and not William's own interpretations.

The evidence discussed above suggests that it would be perverse to view the events of 927 as anything but a political and diplomatic triumph on Æthelstan's part, and this conclusion is born out by subsequent developments in both numismatic and charter evidence. In the absence of a extensive body of contemporary or near-

⁵⁰GRA §134. 'Sihtic's son Anlaf fled to Ireland and his brother Gothfrith to Scotland, and they were promptly followed by envoys from the king, who went to Constantine king of the Scots and Owain king of the Cumbrians to demand the fugitive with the alternative of war. The barbarians had not spirit to utter a word of protest; they preferred to gather without resistance at a place called Dacre and put themselves and their kingdoms in the hands of the English king. In response to this agreement Æthelstan himself stood godfather to Constantine's son, whose baptism he had ordered.' On William's likely (mis) identification of the site as Dacre, see Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems', 91-2.

⁵¹I owe this suggestion to Alex Woolf.

⁵²See below, 128-30.

contemporary narrative material, charters are crucial, and in particular the evidence of proems and witness lists.⁵³ Beginning with Æthelstan's reign, there was an intense, and unprecedented period of evolution in Æthelwulfing charter proems, linked with the use and development of hermeneutic Latin.⁵⁴ Under these circumstances, charter proems cannot be regarded as mere conventions, but instead reflect the changing political ideology current at court, as influenced by outside events.⁵⁵ Indeed, it was not long after the events of 927 when the forms which Æthelstan inherited from his father and grandfather were abandoned in favour of wider claims to authority. In Æthelstan's coronation charter and two charters from 926, Æthelstan is described as 'rex Saxonum et Anglorum', 'Angul Saxonum Rex' and 'Rex Angulsaxonum', various forms of the 'King of the Anglo-Saxons' title which advertised rule over both Mercia and Wessex, first used by Alfred four decades earlier.⁵⁶ A charter from 925 which simply reads 'rex Anglorum' does, however, raise the possibility that there was some evolution in forms in the sixteen years from 909, when, excluding those from Mercia, there are no extant charters from England.⁵⁷

Authentic charters for the year 927 are lacking,⁵⁸ but from 928 to 935 historians are blessed with a remarkable series of charters written by a scribe known as 'Æthelstan A.' The first two extant, both issued at Exeter on Easter Day, 16 April 928,

⁵³In much of what follows, I am indebted to Simon Keynes, who has discussed his forthcoming book, *The charters of King Æthelstan (924-39) and the Making of the Kingdom of the English* with me on several occasions.

⁵⁴Michael Lapidge, 'The hermeneutic style in tenth-century Anglo-Latin Literature', *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975) 67-111, at 99-101.

⁵⁵The question of whether there was a 'Chancery' in the tenth-century, as first suggested in R. Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung* 13 (1935) 335-435, remains a controversy, on which see most recently Pierre Chaplais, 'The Royal Anglo-Saxon "Chancery" of the Tenth Century Revisited', 41-51 in Mayr-Harting, H., and Moore, R. I. eds. *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985), and Simon Keynes, 'Regenbald the Chancellor (*sic*)', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1987) 185-222. This question is not, however, crucial to the issue at hand, as even Chaplais, who is skeptical of the idea that there was a 'central, royal agency', acknowledges at p. 42 that 'Nobody would seriously suggest that a diploma could have been produced without the knowledge or permission of the king whose grant it recorded.' Furthermore, in *The charters*, Keynes will be offering further defence of the idea that 'Æthelstan A' charters were produced by a royal scribe.

⁵⁶S 394; S 396; S 397. The unusual form in S 394 is similar to that in S 346 and S 347, charters of Alfred from 891, which read 'rex Anglorum et Saxonum', and 'Anglorum Saxonum rex'.

⁵⁷S 395.

⁵⁸There is general agreement that S 398, purportedly issued in 927, is a forgery.

refer to Æthelstan as 'rex Anglorum', which perhaps advertises Æthelstan's newly won rule over Northumbria.⁵⁹ More importantly, although *S* 399 has an abbreviated witness list characteristic of charters in the Glastonbury cartularies,⁶⁰ the witness list in *S* 400 is remarkably full, and includes, above the archbishops, subscriptions by 'Howel subregulus', 'Jupwal subregulus', and 'Wurgeat subregulus', all contemporary Welsh kings. These subscriptions, and the subordinate titles which the rulers were accorded, are discussed further below,⁶¹ but represent strong evidence that Æthelstan had employed the submission of the 'Northwalensium' mentioned by William of Malmesbury for practical effect. It was not long before this visible expression of Æthelstan's authority was also reflected in his own titles. Two charters from 930, the only authentic charters between 928 and 931 employ, once again, the title 'rex Anglorum',⁶² but from 931 charters began to explicitly trumpet Æthelstan's authority over all of Britain. With some minor variations, the style used by 'Æthelstan A' in charters from 931 to 935 was 'rex Anglorum, per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Bryttaniæ regni solio sublimatus',⁶³ and many of these charters, like *S* 400, also included subscriptions of Welsh *subreguli*.

One might object that, since charters were distributed only among a small group of people, the titles given to Æthelstan should not be considered to reflect his wider aspirations or authority. While this point is at best arguable, the numismatic evidence supports the idea that the charter evidence should be taken seriously. Titles on coins were a manifestly outward-looking way for Æthelstan to advertise his authority, as his coinage was widely distributed both within and without his *regnum*. Hoards containing his coins were buried, during his reign, as far afield as Dublin, Cork, and Kildare in

⁵⁹*S* 399; *S* 400. In the light of the evidence of *S* 395, this is merely a suggestion.

⁶⁰The fundamental study is Lesley Abrams, *Anglo-Saxon Glastonbury: Church and Endowment* (Woodbridge, 1996).

⁶¹See below, 85-8; 96-98.

⁶²*S* 403; *S* 405.

⁶³*S* 412; *S* 413; *S* 416; *S* 417; *S* 418a; *S* 418; *S* 419; *S* 422; *S* 423; *S* 425; *S* 407 [misdated]; *S* 426, *S* 458. 'King of the English, raised by the right hand of the Almighty to the throne of the whole kingdom of Britain.' Identical terminology is used in *S* 379, *S* 434, and *S* 435, and with slight modifications in *S* 421, but these charters are, as received, spurious.

Ireland, the Isle of Skye, and Rome, and hoards buried during Edmund's reign confirm that his coins had also travelled to France and Denmark.⁶⁴ The titles employed on these coins could not, then, have escaped the notice of either the literate persons within Æthelstan's *regnum*, or his immediate neighbours.

Completely satisfying analysis of the numismatic evidence is, however, hampered by the fact that the chronology of coin issues can not be absolutely, but only relatively represented. Coins in the early part of Æthelstan's reign, represented most importantly by the 'two-line type', which was minted in most of southern England outside East Anglia, bore the simple title of *Rex*.⁶⁵ In the middle of Æthelstan's reign, however, the 'cross type', the most numerous group of extant coins of Æthelstan, was minted in most of southern England, and at newly conquered York. With the exception of some coins minted at Derby, and the handful of extant coins from Nottingham and Tamworth, which bore the title 'Rex Saxorum', 'cross-type' coins employed some version or abbreviation of the title 'Rex totius Britanniae'.⁶⁶ Any suggested date for the first use of the title is, necessarily, subjective. Blunt opined that there is 'insufficient evidence to date the first use of the title *rex totius Britanniae* on the coins to 931 as Brooke tentatively sought to do on the strength of the charter evidence', and concluded that 'Here we can do little more than guess that the cross type might have had a life of some five years, 928-33'.⁶⁷ One can, in any case, safely say that the 'cross type' was first used at some point during the period when Welsh *subreguli* were regularly attending Æthelstan's court, and he began to note claims to authority over all of Britain in his charters.

The 'cross type' was replaced, perhaps, as Blunt hypothesizes, c. 933, in southern England with the 'crowned bust type', which, with the exception of a few coins from Winchester, dropped the title 'Rex totius Britanniae' in favour of the simpler

⁶⁴C. E. Blunt, 'The coinage of Athelstan, 924-39. A Survey', *British Numismatic Journal* 42 (1973) 52.

⁶⁵Blunt, 'The coinage', 47.

⁶⁶Blunt, 'The coinage', 47; 93-6.

⁶⁷Blunt, 'The coinage', 56-7; G. C. Brooke, *English Coins*, 3rd ed. (London, 1950), 57.

'Rex.'⁶⁸ This change was not, however, uniform throughout Æthelstan's *regnum*, and the geographic split is extremely suggestive. In both western and north-western Mercia, most notably at the important port of Chester, and at York, the coins continued to read 'Rex totius Britanniae' until the end of Æthelstan's reign.⁶⁹ Æthelstan's widest claims to authority thus continued to be advertised in Wales, whose various kings had submitted to him and were in regular attendance at his court. The continuance of the practice at York probably had a dual purpose. Not only had the submissions of Constantín, Owen, and Aldred extended a measure of Æthelstan's authority over the whole of Britain, a point which he would have wished to stress, but York was a very recent addition to Æthelstan's *regnum*.

It is, however, the extensions to Æthelstan's *imperium*, best illustrated by various of his neighbouring rulers arriving at his court, and subscribing to his charters as *subreguli*, which most impress upon the historian the significance of Æthelstan's achievement. This has already been the subject of an article by Henry Loyn, but a new look at the evidence is warranted not only because the subscriptions of the northern kings who submitted were not considered, but in light of a new 'Æthelstan A' charter with subscriptions of Welsh *subreguli* which has since been discovered.⁷⁰ Subscriptions for the years 928 to 933 are summarized in the following table, and short discussion of each individual charter follows.⁷¹

⁶⁸Blunt, 'The coinage', 47-8; 66.

⁶⁹Blunt, 'The coinage', 47-8; 88; 97-104.

⁷⁰This charter has been designated S 418a, and will be published in Cyril R. Hart, ed., *Charters of Barking Abbey* (Oxford, forthcoming). The text is available online at <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/users/sdk13/chartwww/Discoveries.html>.

⁷¹The table, and the others in this thesis, are based, in part, on the information in tables XXVII, XXVIII, XXXVI, XXXVII, XXXVIII, XLII, XLV, of Simon Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters c. 670-1066* (forthcoming), and he has my thanks for providing a copy on disk.

Subscriptions of *subreguli* to Æthelstan's charters, 928-933, with Sawyer numbers, dates, and locations. [Aldred subscribes as a 'dux'.]

| S # | Date | Location | Hywel | Idwal | Gwriad | Morgan | Owen | Aldred |
|------|--------------|-----------------|----------|--------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| 400 | 16 Apr. 928 | Exeter, Devon | Howel | Jupwal | Wurgeat | | | |
| 403 | 3 Apr. 930 | Lyminster, Sx | | | | | | Ælred |
| 412 | 23 Mar. 931 | Colchester, Ess | | | | | | Ealdred |
| 413 | 20 June 931 | Worthy, Ha | Huwal | luðwal | | Morgant | Eugenius | Aldred |
| 1604 | 15 July 931 | Wellow, Ha | | | | | | Aldred |
| 416 | 12 Nov. 931 | Lifton, Devon | Howæl | luðwal | | | | Aldred |
| 417 | 30 Aug. 932 | Milton, Kent? | Howel | Juðwal | Wurgeat | Morcant | | Ædelred |
| 418a | 9 Nov. 932 | Exeter, Devon | Hothcell | ludwal | | Morcant | | Aldred |
| 418 | 24 Dec. 932 | Amesbury, W | | | | | | Ealdred |
| 379 | 11 Jan. 933? | Wilton, W | | | | | | Aldred |
| 422 | 26 Jan. 933 | Chippenham, W | | | | | | Aldred |
| 423 | 26 Jan. 933 | Chippenham, W | | | | | | Aldred |
| 420 | 16 Dec. 933? | Kingston, Sr | Huwol | | | | | |

S 400

The three *subreguli* appear on the witness list just below Æthelstan, and above the two archbishops. The identifications of 'Howel' and 'Jupwal' suggested by J. E. Lloyd have been generally accepted, 'Howel' being Hywel Dda (d. 950), king of Dyfed, and 'Jupwal' Idwal Foel (d. 942), king of Gwynedd.⁷² Both were grandsons of Rhodri Mawr (d. 878), and the most important kings in Wales during Æthelstan's reign. An identification problem is posed by 'Wurgeat', although it was suggested as long ago as 1923 that this was a rendering of the Old Welsh name *Guriat* (Modern Welsh *Gwriad*), and Kenneth Jackson is in agreement.⁷³ There is no notice or obituary of a person of this name, but the identification seems probable in the light of obituary notices in *Brut y Tywysogyon* for sons of a 'Gwriad' in 954 and 957.⁷⁴

S 403

⁷²J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, vol. ii. (London, 1911), 353.

⁷³J. Loth, 'La vie la plus ancienne de Saint Samson', *Revue Celtique* 40 (1923) 31, 'Wurgeat est une graphie anglo-saxonne pour *Guriat*'; Kenneth Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 345.

⁷⁴*ByT* 954; *ByT* 957; Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), 114ff concurs that 'Wurgeat' was 'presumably "Gwriad".'

This charter sees the first appearance of a person who should probably be identified as the 'Ealdred Eadulfing from Bebbanbyrig' who is noted as one of those who submitted to Æthelstan in 927. An 'Ælred dux' appears third on the list of ten *duces* who subscribed. The slightly garbled form of his name is not unsurprising, as this charter only survives in cartulary copies which are no earlier than the thirteenth century.⁷⁵

S 412

'Ealdred' appears fifth on the list of thirteen *duces* who subscribed.

S 413

In addition to 'Aldred', who appears tenth on the list of eleven *duces* who subscribed, four *subreguli* subscribed, and appear between the archbishops and bishops. 'Morgant subregulus' is third on the list, after Hywel and Idwal, and there is general agreement that he can be identified as Morgan ab Owain (d. 974), king of Morgannwg. 'Eugenius subregulus' does, however, pose problems of identification. Loyn noted the possibility that he 'could be Welsh or from Strathclyde', while Davies implicitly assumed that this was Owain, Morgan's father.⁷⁶ There is no obituary for this Welsh Owain, and while this identification must remain a possibility, it seems odd that he would appear below his son on the witness list. The better choice may be Owen, king of Strathclyde (d. 937?), who may have submitted to Æthelstan in 927, and like other kings in Britain, was either forced, or found it prudent, to attend his court.

S 1604

This charter is incomplete, but what is there appears to be from an authentic 'Æthelstan A' charter. In the abbreviated witness list 'Aldred' subscribes third among five *duces*.

⁷⁵S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Selsey* (Oxford, 1998), 74, is in agreement that this is a mistake for 'Ealdred.'

⁷⁶Davies, *Wales*, 114; Loyn, 'Wales and England', 292.

S 416

This is a contemporary document, BL Cotton Ch. viii. 16A, regarded by Drögereit, Keynes, and others, as an original.⁷⁷ The witnesses include Æthelstan, the two archbishops, two *subreguli*, seventeen bishops, fifteen *duces*, five abbots, and fifty-nine ministers. Hywel and Idwal appear between the archbishops and bishops, and 'Aldred' appears third in the list of *duces*.

S 417

The *subreguli* appear, once again, between the archbishops and bishops, and Gwriad, who is last on the list, makes his second and last subscription to a charter. Fourth on the list of fifteen *duces* is an 'Ædelred', which, in this twelfth century copy, is probably a garbled subscription of Ealdred.

S 418a

The *subreguli* appear between Æthelstan and the two archbishops. This charter survives in a sixteenth-century manuscript which has been corrupted in places, hence the very odd reading of Hywel's name as 'Hothcell.' This can, perhaps, be explained by a copyist mistaking wynn for thorn, and then a subsequent rendering of þ as 'th.' 'Aldred' appears fourth on the list of eight *duces*.

S 418

'Ealdred' appears fourth on the list of eight *duces*.

S 379

This is, as received, spurious, as it purports to be a charter of Edward the Elder for 921. It appears, however, to be a modified 'Æthelstan A' charter whose features and witness-

⁷⁷Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?', 361; Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978-1016: a Study in their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge, 1980), 16.

list date it to 931x934, and its indiction to 11 January of one of those years. As the charter was issued at Wilton, Wiltshire, and Æthelstan had been close by in Amesbury, Wiltshire on 24 December 932 (*S* 418), Finberg is probably correct to suggest that the original charter was issued on 11 January 933, and Keynes is in agreement.⁷⁸ Ealdred appears fourth on the list of six *duces*.

S 422 and *S* 423

O'Donovan notes that '8 [i.e. *S* 422] lists an Aldred *dux*, whose title is properly given in 7 [i.e. *S* 423] as *abbas*.'⁷⁹ Keynes suggests that 'Aldred abbas' may be the same person as the 'Eadred abbas' who appears as a witness to *S* 418.⁸⁰ Although this explanation merely requires that the correct reading in *S* 418 should have been 'Ea[l]dred abbas', and that the reading of *dux* in *S* 423 is in error, there is a more economical explanation. In both *S* 422 and *S* 423 'Aldred' appears at the break point between the lists of abbots and *duces*, so the title *abbas* in *S* 422 may be a simple slip of the pen. 'Aldred abbas' may, then, be a figment, and the 'Aldred' who appears in *S* 422 and *S* 423 may be the 'Ealdred dux' who subscribed to nine other charters in previous years.

S 420

Although this is a spurious charter, there is the possibility that the very abbreviated witness list should be associated with a gathering on 16 December 933. 'Huwol subregulus' subscribes below Æthelstan, and above a 'Wolstan Archiepiscopus', Wulfstan of York, an 'Elured Episcopus' who could be Alfred of Dorchester or Sherbourne, and an 'Odda', who could possibly refer to either the bishop or the minister of that name who subscribed to many of Æthelstan's charters.

⁷⁸H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of Wessex* (Leicester, 1964), 83; Keynes, *An Atlas*, Table XXVII.

⁷⁹M. A. O'Donovan, *Charters of Sherborne* (Oxford, 1988), 31.

⁸⁰Keynes, *An Atlas*, Table XXXVII.

This series of charters embodies some of the most concrete evidence for Æthelstan's relations with his neighbours, but its interpretation is elusive. Loyn, referring to later charter evidence as well, argued that:

We can fairly say that the surviving evidence is the tip of an iceberg. The presence of Welsh rulers in attendance on Athelstan and his brother[s] from 928 into the 950s, at places as diverse as Exeter and Nottingham and Kingston-on-Thames, suggests that it was regarded as quite normal that such attendance should be recorded. The precedence afforded the Welsh princes, notably in the Amounderness charter [S 407], suggests further that special honour was paid them and that their position was recognised as different from the other great men who were present. To Athelstan undoubtedly they were regarded as subordinate and it is quite possible that regular gifts, if not regular tribute, were expected.⁸¹

There is very little to disagree with here, although it must be said that 928-33 is one period when historians are, by tenth-century standards, very well served by the evidence, largely because 'Æthelstan A' had a very inclusive view of who to include on witness-lists. We are, fortunate, as well, that other surviving charters were issued on the same day as the two 'Æthelstan A' charters from this period which do not have surviving witness-lists.⁸² Loyn is almost certainly correct, however, to stress the ambiguous nature of the relationship of the Welsh *subreguli* with Æthelstan, and his assessment of their special status is compatible with Keynes' comment on Æthelred of Mercia, that his 'status was clearly quite different from that of other *duces*.'⁸³

This special status is best illustrated by their placement on witness lists. In S 400 and S 418a, two charters which are almost above suspicion and S 420, whose testimony may be unreliable, the *subreguli* appear in the most honoured position possible, just below Æthelstan, and before the archbishops. Their position is not far worse in S 413, S 416, and S 417, where they appear below the two archbishops, but above all other bishops, and well before any other secular members of Æthelstan's political community. It seems, in addition, that there was a clear pecking order amongst

⁸¹Loyn, 'Wales and England', 298-9.

⁸²S 399, issued the same day as S 400, and S 419, issued on the same day as S 418.

⁸³Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in Blackburn, M. A. S and Dumville, D. N. eds. *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1998), 1-45, at 29.

the *subreguli*, as Hywel always appears first, and is followed by Idwal. Morgan appears to have been the most important of the other, less frequent visitors to Æthelstan's court, as he appears before both Owen in *S* 413 and Gwriad in *S* 417. Ultimately, however, this was merely a determination of who would be the most exalted of Æthelstan's subordinates; the very term *subregulus* advertises this fact. Despite this, it may not be correct to view their attendance as a humiliation, and it seems, in particular, wide of the mark to say that:

There can have been no other way for Hywel and Idwal to have seen the sequence of events culminating at Exeter other than as extremely ignoble. . . . These rulers—certainly Hywel and Idwal—must have been seething with suppressed indignation.⁸⁴

There was, in all likelihood, a measure of reciprocity in their relationship; one wonders whether Hywel would have been secure enough to make a pilgrimage to Rome if he did not have Æthelstan's support.⁸⁵

Kirby's suggestion that attendance at court was an 'obligation' has much more in it, as it goes to the heart of Æthelstan's motives for hosting the Welsh kings.⁸⁶ The most transparently obvious motive was to impress upon them the fact that he was now biggest king on the block. Yet, much as Asser strove to advertise with his comments on the presence of foreigners at Alfred's court, the attendance of foreign, subordinate kings, would have had the added benefit of reflecting glory upon Æthelstan, and strengthening his position at home. A deeper motive may, however, have been a policy of deliberately integrating Welsh figures into a rapidly evolving political community where the importance of Æthelstan's status as 'King of the Anglo-Saxons', or 'King of the English', was being pushed aside in favour of wider claims to authority, advertised in charters and coins. Even so, these claims were not accurate, as Æthelstan clearly was not attempting to form a new *regnum* which included all of Britain; his itinerary suggests that he rarely ventured outside the traditional West Saxon heartland of his

⁸⁴Kirby, 'Hywel Dda', 4.

⁸⁵AC 928. 'Higuel rex perrexit ad Romam.'

⁸⁶Kirby, 'Hywel Dda', 4.

grandfather.⁸⁷ Instead, Æthelstan was forging an *imperium* with multiple, subordinate *regna* whose leaders were, it seems, obliged to attend his court.

As has been long recognized, tribute was also a feature of these relationships, and William of Malmesbury offers an oft-quoted but almost certainly fantastic catalogue:

Ita quod nullas ante eum rex uel cogitare presumpserat, ipse in effectum formauit, ut ei nomine uectigalis annuatim uiginti libras auri, trecentas argentipenderent, boues uiginti quinque milia annumerarent, preterea quot liberet canes qui odorisequo nare spelea et diuerticula ferarum deprehenderent, uolucres quae aliarum auium predam per inane uenari nossent.⁸⁸

The most important evidence comes, however, from the Welsh poem *Armes Prydain*, a mid-tenth century composition which both prophecies the day when the English will be overthrown by a grand coalition, and contains many references to tribute.⁸⁹ Dating of this composition cannot be any more precise than 935x950, so one cannot be certain that the *mechteyrn*, or 'great king' mentioned in the poem is Æthelstan, but the tribute taking almost certainly refers to practice contemporary during his, or Edmund's reign.⁹⁰ Lines 17-24 read as follows, although the translation is difficult and very much open to interpretation:

Dysgogan Myrdin kyueruyd hyn.
yn Aber Perydon meiryon mechteyrn.
A chyny bei vn reith lleith a gwynyn.
o vn ewyllis bryt yd ymwrthuynnyn.
Meiryon eu tretheu dychynnullyn.
yg ketoed Kymry nat oed a telhyn.
yssyd wr dylyedawc a lefeir hyn.
(ny dyffei a talei yg keithiwet).

Myrddin foretells that they will meet
in Aber Peryddon, the stewards of the great king.

⁸⁷David Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), 87. This itinerary is, however, certainly incomplete, as it can only be established via locations where charters were granted.

⁸⁸*GRA* §134. 'He thus brought into effect what no king before him had presumed even to contemplate: they were to pay him by way of annual tribute twenty pounds of gold and three hundred pounds of silver, and to hand over by the count 25,000 oxen, besides as many as he might wish of hounds that with their keen scent could track down the lairs and lurking-places of wild beast, and birds of prey skilled in pursuing other birds through empty air.'

⁸⁹For Williams, ed., *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain* (Dublin, 1972).

⁹⁰935x950 is the cautious suggestion of David N. Dumville, 'Brittany and <<Armes Prydein Vawr>>', *Etudes Celtiques* 20 (1983) 150, as against the more precise dating of 939x942 argued in Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, vol. ii. (Dublin, 1979), 65-72 and 113.

(And though it be not in the same way, they will (all) lament death)
with a single will they will offer battle.
The stewards will collect their taxes-
in the armies (?) of the Cymry, there was nobody who would pay (?).
He is a noble man who says this:
(nobody would pay them under compulsion).⁹¹

The 'Aber Peryddon' mentioned may be the location where the tribute was paid, and Williams tentatively suggests that this may be Rockfield, just north-west of Monmouth on the Monnow River.⁹² A second crucial passage, on lines 69-72 reads:

Meiryon Kaer Geri difri cwynant.
rei y dyffryn a bryn nys dirwadant.
y Aber Perydon ny mat doethant.
anaeleu tretheu dychynullant.

The stewards of Caer Geri will lament bitterly,
in valley and on hill, some do not deny it-
not fortunately did they come to Aber Peryddon,
afflictions are the taxes they will collect.⁹³

Williams notes that Asser refers to Cirencester, 'quae Britannice Cairceri nominatur', so this seems to have been a base for the stewards who collected the Welsh tribute.⁹⁴

There are further references to tribute, and payback, at lines 84-87, 98-104, 141-146, and 159-60.⁹⁵ Line 123 reads, as well, 'Ef dialawr y treth ar gwerth beunyd', 'The tributes and daily payments will be avenged.'⁹⁶ Williams concluded, not surprisingly, that 'From all of this we gather that the tribute was thoroughly unpopular!'⁹⁷ More importantly, however, the various references suggest that a thoroughly organized system of tribute collection, probably based in Cirencester, was operating for southern Wales. It seems that no opposition could be mustered, other than wishful prophesy, to this practical extension of Æthelstan's *imperium*.

⁹¹Williams, *Armes Prydain*, 2-3.

⁹²Williams, *Armes Prydain*, xxxvi-vii.

⁹³Williams, *Armes Prydain*, 6-7.

⁹⁴Williams, *Armes Prydain*, 42; William Henry Stevenson, ed., *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1959), 47.

⁹⁵Williams, *Armes Prydain*, 6-13.

⁹⁶Williams, *Armes Prydain*, 10-11.

⁹⁷Williams, *Armes Prydain*, xix.

While one could argue that these circumstances should be seen as part of a long period of submissions of Welsh kings to Æthelwulfing kings,⁹⁸ it is unarguable that Æthelstan's authority in northern Britain was a novel departure. In the period from 930 to 933 this manifested itself especially in the attendance, on far more occasions than the Welsh *subreguli*, of Ealdred of Bamburgh at Æthelstan's court. The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* also mentions Uhtred, a brother of Ealdred, and it is possible that he should also be associated with one of the Uhtred's who appears as a witness to Æthelstan's charters.⁹⁹ Both Ealdred, and the history of northern England in this period, are, however, enigmas. The *Annals of Ulster* record the death of his father in 913, and in addition to being noticed as the primary leader, in the 910s, by the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, he is also almost certainly one of the 'Eadulfes suna' who met Edward in 920.¹⁰⁰ This entry, and the account of the submission to Æthelstan in 927, implicitly recognize his authority in the northern half of Northumbria, even if they do withhold regal status from him. This reflects the attitude towards him at Æthelstan's court, as unlike the Welsh kings, he did not subscribe to charters as a *subregulus*, but as a mere *dux*, or ealdorman as it would have been termed in Old English. This may not have been how he viewed himself, and his near-perfect record of attendance at Æthelstan's court suggests that he was being deliberately kept close so he could not stir up trouble.¹⁰¹ But after January 933 Ealdred disappears from witness lists, and the obituary of an 'Adulf m^cEtulfe king of North Saxons', who should probably be

⁹⁸Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990), 73-76.

⁹⁹*HSC* §22. There were two different Uhtred's who subscribed as *duces* Æthelstan's charters. Keynes, *An Atlas*, Table XXXVIII, suggests that 'Uhtred 1' is the person who appears as a witness, in the period 930-35, to *S* 403, *S* 405, *S* 412, *S* 413, *S* 416, *S* 417, *S* 418a, *S* 379, *S* 422, *S* 425, *S* 407, *S* 434, and nine charters in the period 937-9, while 'Uhtred 2' is the second Uhtred on *S* 412, *S* 413, *S* 416-18, *S* 407, and *S* 434. I would suggest, however, that the sole Uhtreds on *S* 418a, and *S* 425, who appear seventh and eighth on the list of *duces*, were actually 'Uhtred 2', as this is, most often, his position in the witness list. 'Uhtred 1', on the other hand, most often appears fourth or fifth among the *duces* on the witness list. If either of the Uhtred's is to be identified as Ealdred's brother, it seems more likely that he is 'Uhtred 2', which would make him a witness to only those charters where either Ealdred, or Osulf [see below, 96-8; 130-33], was also a witness.

¹⁰⁰*AU* 913.1; *ASC* A 920.

¹⁰¹Ealdred's name is absent from only one charter with a substantial witness-list, *S* 405, in the period from 930-3.

associated with him, appears in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* in the next year.¹⁰² These, and other pieces of underutilised evidence, suggest a more satisfactory explanation of Æthelstan's invasion of northern Britain in 934 than has been offered in the past.

Most historians have suggested, prompted by what may only be an interpretation of John of Worcester, that the invasion came about because Constantín broke some term of the agreement he made with Æthelstan in 927.¹⁰³ Alfred Smyth has provided the fullest interpretation along these lines, and suggests it is connected with the comment in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which notes that those who participated in the meeting in 927 'renounced all idolatry'; this could be interpreted as a promise not to enter into alliances with Dublin Scandinavians.¹⁰⁴ In 934 Gothfrith, who had been chased out of Britain by Æthelstan in 927, died and was succeeded by his son Olaf, and the suggestion is that 'Constantine and Owen had broken their pledges. . . [and] reverted to their "idolatrous" alliance with Dublin'.¹⁰⁵ This is certainly a plausible interpretation, and may be part of the answer, but it does not take internal developments in Britain into full account. In particular, Constantín, and perhaps Owen as well (if he is not the 'Eugenius' in *S* 413), had not, unlike all others who had submitted in 927, attended Æthelstan's court. This was a state of affairs which could not continue if he wished credibly to portray himself as 'Rex totius Britanniae.' In addition, the exile and drowning of Edwin, Æthelstan's half-brother, in 933, removed any focus for discontent which could have potentially developed while he was on a foreign expedition.¹⁰⁶ These two considerations made it both desirable and possible to bring

¹⁰²Denis Murphy, ed., *The Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Dublin, 1896) sub anno 928 [recte 934]; compare sub anno 904 [recte 913] 'Edulfe King of the north Saxons'; *AU* 913.1 'Etulbb ri Saxan Tuaiscirt.'

¹⁰³*JW* 934. 'Strenuus rex Anglorum Athelstanus quia rex Scottorum Constantinus foedus quod cum eo pepigerat dirupit.'

¹⁰⁴Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London, 1984), 201-3.

¹⁰⁵Smyth, *Warlords*, 203; *AU* 934.1.

¹⁰⁶*ASC* E 933 'Her adranc Ædwine Æðeling on sae', 'In this year the atheling Edwin was drowned at sea'; *HRA* C 933 claims explicitly that this was at Æthelstan's command, 'Rex Ethelstanus jussit Eadwinum fratrem suum submergi in mare.'

Constantín to heel, but death of Ealdred may have also conspired to make it necessary if Æthelstan was to retain any authority north of York.¹⁰⁷

We would be able to say little about Æthelstan's campaign if we were forced to rely on the testimony of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; its various versions state merely that 'Her for Æþelstan cyning in on Scotland, ægþer ge mid landhere ge mid scyphere, 7 his micel oferhergade.'¹⁰⁸ Charter witness-lists, once again, add a crucial dimension to the flat narrative sources. Subscriptions of *subreguli* in 934 and 935 are summarized in the following table, and short discussion of each individual charter follows.

Subscriptions of 'subreguli' to Æthelstan's charters, 934-935, with Sawyer numbers, dates, and locations. [Osulf subscribes as a 'dux'.]

| S # | Date | Location | Hywel | Idwal | Morgan | Osulf | Constantín | Owen |
|------|--------------|-------------|--------|-----------|---------|-------|--------------|----------|
| 425 | 28 May 934 | Winchester | Howæl | Juðwal | Morcant | Osulf | | |
| 407 | 7 June 934 | Nottingham | Howael | luðwal | Morgant | Osulf | | |
| 426 | 13 Sep. 934 | Buckingham | | | | | Constantinus | |
| 427 | 16 Dec. 934? | Frome, So | Huwal | | | | | |
| 1792 | 935 | Cirencester | Howel | Vithualin | Morcane | | Constantinus | Eugenius |
| 434 | 21 Dec. 935? | Dorchester | Howel | Juthua | Morcant | Osulf | | Eugenius |
| 435 | 21 Dec. 935? | Dorchester | Howel | Juthual | Morcant | Osulf | | Eugenius |

A 'Teowdor subregulus' also appears as a witness to S 425.

S 425

This is one of two charters of 'Æthelstan A', along with S 416, which survives as a contemporary document. In addition to Æthelstan, it bears the subscriptions of the two archbishops, followed by four *subreguli*, seventeen bishops, four abbots, twelve *duces*, and fifty-two ministers. This charter, issued at Winchester on 28 May 934, was likely written at an assembly which marked the initial muster of Æthelstan's forces before the

¹⁰⁷As it is not possible to determine when, exactly, Ealdred died, one must also consider the possibility that he was complicit in some conspiracy in the north, and died during, or was killed as a result of Æthelstan's campaign. In favour of this idea, Ealdred's obituary in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* does appear after notice of Æthelstan's campaign. Against this idea, the obituary simply notices his death, and gives no hint of foul play or a violent end.

¹⁰⁸ASC A 934, 'In this year King Athelstan went into Scotland with both a land force and a naval force, and ravaged much of it.'

trip north. A 'Teowdor subregulus' makes his sole subscription to this charter, and he can likely be identified as Tewdwr of Brycheiniog.¹⁰⁹ In place of Ealdred, who has disappeared, an 'Osulf' appears seventh on the list of *duces*. Three charters from Eadred's reign associate an Osulf, probably the same person, with Bamburgh, as 'Bebbanbyrig' appears after his name.¹¹⁰ This is also probably, although not certainly the same Osulf who subscribed to *S* 520 and *S* 546, also from Eadred's reign, and 'received the earldom of the Northumbrians' in 953.¹¹¹

S 407

Often referred to as the Amounderness charter, this charter was issued at Nottingham on 7 June 934, 10 days after Æthelstan had been at Winchester, and apparently on the trip north. Like *S* 425, it has an extraordinarily long witness list, but a scribe seems to have grown bored with the length of the list, as he concluded it with the comment that, 'Et plures alii milites, quorum nomina in eadem carta inseruntur, consenserunt et subscripserunt.' The three *subreguli* subscribe just below the archbishops, and unusually, Morgan appears above Idwal. Osulf appears fourth on the list of thirteen *duces*.¹¹²

S 426

This charter was issued after Æthelstan's campaign, which, on the evidence of this charter, was apparently successful. Unfortunately, as in most charters in Glastonbury cartularies, the witness list has been extremely abbreviated, and only shows Æthelstan and a 'Constantinus subregulus.'

S 427

¹⁰⁹Davies, *Wales*, 114.

¹¹⁰*S* 544; *S* 550; *S* 552a.

¹¹¹*HRA* C 953, 'Comes Osulf suscepit comitatum Northanhymbrorum.'

¹¹²For further discussion, and a translation see *EHD* 505-8.

This charter is spurious as received, but there is no obvious anachronism in the witness-list barring the title, odd for this period, 'Angul Saxonum necnon et totius Britanniae rex, gratia Dei regni solio sublimatus', given to Æthelstan. It may, therefore, be evidence of an assembly on the date given. 'Huwal subregulus' appears above the two archbishops, but an Old English version of the text exists which is of more interest. Here *subregulus* appears as *under cyning*, which suggests that 'under-king' is the most appropriate translation, into modern English, of *subregulus*.

S 1792

This is a fragment of a charter, with a few witnesses, which is dated simply to, and is consistent with, the year 935. 'Constantinus subregulus' subscribes under Æthelstan, and is followed by 'Eugenius', most likely in this case Owen of Strathclyde. The Welsh *subreguli* follow 'Eugenius' in the usual order.

S 434 and S 435

Both these charters are spurious as received, as both the witnesses and formulae date to 935, while the charters are dated 937. They seem, however, to be based on authentic 'Æthelstan A' charters issued on 21 December 935, and in both cases the *subreguli* follow the archbishops in the witness list. In S 434 'Eugenius subregulus' heads them, and is followed by Hywel, Morgan, and Idwal. In S 435 'Howel subregulus' is the first listed, and is followed by 'Eugenius', Idwal, who appears in error as an *episcopus*, and Morgan. In S 434 Osulf appears third on the list of eight *duces*, and in S 435 last on the list of four *duces*.

The subordination of foreign kings could not, of course, be the only consideration for any early medieval king intent on expanding his *imperium*. Relations with ecclesiastical institutions were very important as well, and this was a facet of early medieval kingship which Æthelstan certainly did not neglect. In addition to the stop at

Nottingham established by S 407, there is evidence that one other important piece of business was conducted on Æthelstan's trip north, a visit to the Community of St. Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street. The *Historia Regum* records how:

Rex Ethelstanus cum multo exercitu Scotiam tendens, ad sepulcrum Sancti Cuthberti venit, illius patrocínio se suumque iter commendavit, multa ac diversa dona quæ regem decerent ei obtulit et terras, æterno igni contradens cruciandos quicumque ei aliquid ex his subtraxerint.¹¹³

Chapter 26 of the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* also records this event, and includes a 'charter' of King Æthelstan which set out a long list of gifts to the Community, some of which have survived to the modern day.¹¹⁴ These include the stole and maniple which were removed from Cuthbert's tomb in 1827,¹¹⁵ and a late ninth- or early tenth-century gospel book, BL MS Cotton Otho B.IX, which has been almost completely destroyed by fire, but bears an inscription which notes that it had been a gift given by Æthelstan.¹¹⁶

Æthelstan's visit, which likely occurred on 1 July,¹¹⁷ the wider circumstances surrounding it, and possible reasons for his patronage have been well-explored in recent work.¹¹⁸ The conventional interpretation is, essentially, that the Community was beset by Scandinavian and Scots enemies and required a strong patron to protect them,

¹¹³HRA C 934, 'King Athelstan, going towards Scotland with a great army, came to the tomb of St. Cuthbert, commended himself and his expedition to his protection, and conferred on him many and diverse gifts befitting a king, as well as estates, and consigned to the torments of eternal fire anyone who should take any of these from him.'

¹¹⁴David Rollason, 'St Cuthbert and Wessex: The Evidence of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 183', in Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe, eds., *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community* (Woodbridge, 1989), 420-2 makes a convincing argument, however, that CCCC MS 183 was not one of these gifts, although it is normally associated with the 'sancti Cuthberti uitam metrice et prosaice scriptam' mentioned in the list of gifts. For an opposing view see Keynes, 'King Athelstan's books', 180-85.

¹¹⁵Gerald Bonner, 'St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street', in Bonner *et al* eds., *St. Cuthbert*, 387-95, at 391.

¹¹⁶Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', 170-9. He notes at 178 that one need not assume that all the gifts mentioned were handed over on the occasion of Æthelstan's visit.

¹¹⁷Keynes, 'King Athelstan's books', 172-3.

¹¹⁸See Eric Cambridge, 'Why did the Community of St Cuthbert settle of Chester-le-Street?', in Bonner *et al* eds., *St. Cuthbert*, 367-86; Luisella Simpson, 'The King Alfred/St Cuthbert Episode in the *Historia de sancto Cuthberto*: Its Significance for mid-tenth-century English History', in Bonner *et al* eds., *St. Cuthbert*, 397-411; Ted Johnson-South, 'Competition for King Alfred's Aura in the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon England', *Albion* 23 (1992) 613-26; Ted Johnson-South, 'The Norman Conquest of Durham: Norman Historians and the Anglo-Saxon Community of St. Cuthbert', *Haskins Society Journal* 4 (1992) 85-95.

a role which Æthelstan and his successors could fulfill. This scholarship has, however, reflected the preoccupation with the Æthelwulfing dynasty which tenth-century historians of Britain have displayed, to the neglect of other, parallel developments. Scholarship, best displayed in the 1989 volume on the Community of St. Cuthbert, underscores the point that Northumbria generally, and Lindisfarne specifically, was at a cultural crossroads in the seventh and eighth centuries. Furthermore, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the Community found itself at the centre of both a figurative and literal *political* crossroads, and the wider implications of Æthelstan's patronage, especially with regard to the Community's northern neighbours, must be taken into account. At first, this may seem a difficult prospect, especially in light of Geoffrey Barrow's recent assertion that 'The surviving evidence, admittedly not abundant, gives no hint of any devotion to Cuthbert on the part of Scottish rulers of the Cenel nGabrain, who held sway in Alba from the mid ninth-century.'¹¹⁹

A passage in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* does, however, hint that Constantín was friendly with the Community. It records how Constantín came to the aid, although he was defeated, of both Ealdred, and a certain 'Elfredum sancti Cuthberti fidelem', when they were threatened by Ragnald.¹²⁰ There are mutually exclusive elements between this battle, which cannot be dated any more precisely than 913x921,¹²¹ and that fought by Constantín and Ragnald in 918,¹²² so Constantín had, twice, brought armies into the lands of the Community of St. Cuthbert in the 910s or early 920s. Since, as Luisella Simpson has convincingly argued, chapters 1-28 were

¹¹⁹Geoffrey Barrow, 'The Kings of Scotland and Durham', in David Rollason, Margaret Harvey, and Michael Prestwich, eds., *Anglo-Norman Durham 1093-1193* (Woodbridge, 1994), 312.

¹²⁰HSC §22.

¹²¹More precise suggestions for the dates of this battle, and another fought against Ragnald which was narrated in chapter 24, have been suggested. This suggestions rely however, on uncertain identifications of persons named, and assume a chronological discipline within the *Historia* which is nonexistent.

¹²²AU 918.4, which notes that 'Fir Alban dono ara cenn-somh co comarinechtar for bru Tine la Saxanu Tuaiscirt', 'The men of Scotland, moreover, moved against them [Ragnald's forces] and they met on the bank of the Tyne in northern Saxonland'.

composed from sources which were likely gathered together c. 945,¹²³ it would be surprising indeed if Constantín would have escaped negative comment had his forces not been welcome in the Cuthbertine heartland around the Tyne.

Friendship between the Community and kings based north of the Firth of Forth was not, however any new thing. As suggested as long ago as 1884, and re-discovered recently by the attentions of Jean Gerchow and Stuart Airlie, there is evidence for Pictish connections with the Community in BL MS Cotton Domitian VII, otherwise known as the *Liber Vitae* of Durham.¹²⁴ Three persons, 'Unust', 'Custantin', and 'Uoenan', who can be identified as eighth- and ninth-century Pictish kings, appear among the *Nomina regum vel ducum* in the *Liber Vitae*. 'Unust' can be identified as the 'Oengus m. Ferghussa regis Pictorum' who died in 761, 'Custantin' as the 'Custantin m. Fergus rex Fortreinn' who died in 820, and 'Uoenan' as the 'Euganan m. Oengusa' who was killed by Scandinavians in 839.¹²⁵ The Pictish kings seem curiously out of place among the others, who, with one exception, were either kings of Northumbria or those who had invaded it with some success. The exception is Charlemagne who, as Joanna Story has argued, was exercising a degree of political, and perhaps spiritual authority in Northumbria in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.¹²⁶ The presence of the Pictish kings in the memorial book merely establishes that, at the most basic

¹²³Simpson, 'The King Alfred/St Cuthbert Episode', 397-404. Ted Johnson South, *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of His Patrimony*, (Cambridge, 2002), 25-36 has established, however, that the text as received was likely composed during the reign of Canute.

¹²⁴E. M. Thompson, *Catalogue of Ancient Manuscripts in the British Museum II: Latin* (London, 1884), 81; Jean Gerchow, *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen* (Berlin, 1988), 149-54; Stuart Airlie, 'The View from Maastricht', in Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scotland in Dark-Age Europe* (St. Andrews, 1994), 41-2.

¹²⁵AU 761.4; AU 820.3; AU 839.9. 'Uoenan' is the last name to appear on this list, so a date of c. 840 for the *Liber Vitae*, before it received later additions, is likely. For further discussion of these kings see John Bannerman, 'The Scottish takeover of Pictland and the relics of Columba', *Innes Review* 48 (1997) 27-44; for some different views Dauvit Broun, 'Pictish Kings 761-839: Integration with Dál Riata or Separate Development', in Sally M. Foster, ed., *The St Andrews Sarcophagus: A Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections*, (Dublin, 1998), 71-83; and for some earlier views Marjorie O. Anderson, 'Dalriada and the creation of the kingdom of the Scots', in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick, and David Dumville, eds., *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), 106-32.

¹²⁶Joanna Elizabeth Story, 'Charlemagne and Northumbria: the Influence of Francia on Northumbrian Politics in the Later Eighth and Early Ninth Centuries', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1996.

level, that they were being included in the Community's prayers, and had some connection with them over a long period of time. The oddity of their inclusion suggests, however, at least the possibility that they were patrons of the Community. Even if, as Broun has suggested, these Pictish kings were not members of the same dynasty as Cináed mac Ailpín, Constantín king of Alba's grandfather, Constantín may have inherited a legacy of friendly dealings with the Community.¹²⁷

No such legacy can be suggested for Æthelstan. It is true, as David Rollason put it, that:

There is no doubt that Cuthbert was a well known saint in the south from an early date. He had been given prominence by Bede and his deposition feast (20 March) occurs in virtually every English liturgical and quasi-liturgical text from the calendar of St. Willibrord onwards.¹²⁸

This does not, however, establish any measure of personal devotion, much less patronage, by Æthelwulfing kings, although one might point to the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* as possible evidence. There is, in particular, a long miracle story in which Cuthbert appeared to Alfred, after he had hidden for three years in the Glastonbury marsh, and promised him and his sons victory over their enemies and rule over all of Britain.¹²⁹ Alfred duly defeated his enemies, sent gifts to St. Cuthbert through his son Edward, 'monuitque eum [Edward] diligenter ut amaret Deum et sanctum Cuthbertum, et speraret in eis sicut ipse semper sperauit, et adhuc maxime sperabat.'¹³⁰ All this is almost certainly invented tradition. As Luisella Simpson put it, 'a king in such straits as Alfred was at the beginning of 878, who then won a memorable battle, is a subject begging for a miracle story.'¹³¹ She further queried whether there is 'any evidence that the St Cuthbert/Alfred legend was inspired by an actual link between between King

¹²⁷There was, however, an early hiccup in the relationship if the testimony of the 'Scottish Chronicle' can be trusted, as it records that Cináed seized Melrose, which was a Cuthbertine possession. See Benjamin T. Hudson, 'The "Scottish Chronicle"', *Scottish Historical Review* 77 (1998) 148, 153.

¹²⁸Rollason, 'St. Cuthbert and Wessex', 423.

¹²⁹HSC §14-19.

¹³⁰HSC §19. 'and admonished him [Edward] diligently to love God and St. Cuthbert and to trust in them just as he himself had always trusted, and very much continued to trust.'

¹³¹Simpson, 'The King Alfred/St Cuthbert Episode', 407.

Alfred and the cult or community of St. Cuthbert? The answer must be mainly in the negative.¹³² It seems, rather, that Alfred and Edward were retrospectively included among the Community's patrons when, c. 945, the materials for chapters 1-28 of the *Historia* were drawn up by a Cuthbertine to whom the patronage of their successors Æthelstan and Edmund was very fresh in the mind. Cuthbert's 'aid' to Alfred provided an object lesson as to why it was in kings' best interests to be patrons of the Community, and this was a point which may have prompted the re-working of the mid-tenth-century material, with additions, during the reign of Canute.

The first credible evidence for Æthelwulfing devotion to St. Cuthbert is then, almost certainly, Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 183, which, as both Simon Keynes and David Rollason agree, was written in the later years of Æthelstan's reign.¹³³ Rollason characterizes the manuscript as 'a token of the king's devotion to Cuthbert, a book perhaps intended for private meditation, perhaps also intended to publicize that devotion in the king's southern heartland.'¹³⁴ Æthelstan, then, may have been as much impressed by the Community as the Community was of his patronage, which must be considered in the context of his impressive record of gifts to ecclesiastical institutions.¹³⁵ While ecclesiastical patronage was, of course, a fundamental aspect of early medieval kingship, the fact that the target of Æthelstan's invasion of 934 was Constantín suggests that there was an immediate, and perhaps overtly political reason for patronage of the Community. Æthelstan may have been usurping Constantín's status as the prime protector of the Cuthbertines, without whose support no king could attempt to control northern Northumbria. Constantín was in no

¹³²Simpson, 'The King Alfred/St Cuthbert Episode', 407.

¹³³The dating is made possible by episcopal lists in the manuscript. Keynes, 'King Athelstan's books', 182 suggests June 934 x October 939, while Rollason, 'St. Cuthbert and Wessex', 414-15 suggests that 'it must have been written before 937 x 8 when Aelfheah of Wells relinquished his see.'

¹³⁴Rollason, 'St. Cuthbert and Wessex', 422.

¹³⁵Keynes, 'King Athelstan's books', 143-47.

position to compete, which may be why evidence for Pictish and Mac Ailpín interest in the Community has been reduced to an echo.¹³⁶

As for the course of Æthelstan's campaign itself, there is little information. The *Historia Regum* claims that he 'hostes subegit, Scotiam usque Dunfoeder et Wertermorum terrestri exercitu vastavit, navali vero usque Catenes depopulatus est.'¹³⁷ The *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*, a twelfth-century Durham source, also notes that Owen, King of Strathclyde was one of Æthelstan's targets.¹³⁸ The success of the invasion, can, however, be best judged by the subscription of 'Constantinus subregulus' to S 426 on 13 September at Buckingham; Constantín had been brought back to Æthelstan's court. This may not have been the only humiliation for Constantín.¹³⁹ John of Worcester wrote of the aftermath of the invasion, 'Vnde ui compulsus rex Constantinus filium suum obsidem cum dignis muneribus illi dedit, paceque redintegrata, rex in Wessaxoniam rediit.'¹⁴⁰ One might be inclined to dismiss the reference to hostage-giving as a later invention, but it does not, crucially, seem to be an *interpretation*, and in the light of Constantín's submission, it seems very plausible. It was an action, as well, which spoke in the diplomatic language of the society of which Constantín was a part.¹⁴¹ It concluded a triumphant year for Æthelstan in which he set out on an invasion of Scotland with an army which included Welsh *subreguli*, perhaps usurped the support of a saints' cult, brought his enemy back to his own court and kept a son as a hostage. No other tenth-century king in Britain effected an achievement on this scale.

¹³⁶There is, however, good evidence for Kings of Scots dealings with the Cuthbertines in the eleventh and twelfth century, for which see William M. Aird, *St Cuthbert and the Normans: The Church of Durham, 1071-1153* (Woodbridge, 1998), especially 227-67.

¹³⁷HRA C 934. 'subdued his enemies, laid waste Scotland as far as Dunnottar and Wertermorum with a land force, and ravaged with a naval force as far as Caithness.'

¹³⁸*Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*, in Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, vol. i. (London, 1882), 76.

¹³⁹One characterizes this as a 'humiliation' because it came as a result of a military campaign, rather than through voluntary means such as Anarawd's submission to Alfred.

¹⁴⁰JW 934. 'Whence, compelled by force, King Constantine gave him [Æthelstan] his son as a hostage, and worthy gifts, and when peace was restored, the king returned to Wessex.'

¹⁴¹Robin Chapman Stacey, *The Road to Judgement: From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia, 1994), 82-111.

The evidence of *S* 1792 establishes that Æthelstan was also able to force Constantín's presence at court, along with Owen of Strathclyde, at some point in 935. One wonders, however, whether the Welsh *subreguli*, and Hywel in particular, were happy about this, as Constantín and Owen had taken over his position following Æthelstan in the witness list. Unfortunately, after 21 December 935, when two extant charters were issued, 'Æthelstan A' stopped writing charters, and we lack evidence for any further subscriptions of *subreguli* for the rest of his reign. At this assembly, Owen appears along with the others who regularly attended, but Constantín was ominously absent. Whatever trouble was brewing on Æthelstan's northern borders at that point, he was, however, secure enough in 936 to intervene in both Frankish and Breton politics. Flodoard writes:

Brittones a transmarinis regionibus, Alstani regis praesidio, revertentes terram suam repetunt. Hugo comes trans mare mittit pro accersiendo ad apicem regni suscipiendum Ludowico, Karoli filio, quem rex Alstanus avunculus ipsius, accepto prius iurejurando a Francorum legatis, in Franciam cum quibusdam episcopis et aliis fidelibus suis dirigit; cui Hugo et ceteri Francorum proceres obviam profecti, mox navim egresso, in ipsis littoreis harenis apud Bononiam, sese committunt, ut erat untrunque depactum. Indeque ab ipsis Laudunum deductus ac regali benedictione ditatus ungitur atque coronatur a domno Artoldo archiepiscopo, praesentibus regni principibus cum episcopis xx et amplius.¹⁴²

Æthelstan's role in these events was yet another unprecedented departure, although his involvement is not surprising considering his familial relations with those involved, and the more general evidence for continental relations in this period.¹⁴³ Yet unlike any

¹⁴²Lauer, 63-4. Translation *EHD*, 316, 'The Bretons, returning from the lands across the sea with the support of King Athelstan, came back to their country. Duke [Count] Hugh sent across the sea to summon Louis, son of Charles, to be received as king and King Athelstan, his uncle, first taking oaths from the legates of the Franks, sent him to the Frankish kingdom with some of his bishops and other other followers. Hugh and the other nobles of the Franks went to meet him and committed themselves to him immediately he disembarked on the sands of Boulogne, as had been agreed by both sides, From there he was conducted by them to Laon, and endowed with the royal benediction, he was anointed and crowned by the lord Archbishop Artold, in the presence of the chief men of the kingdom, with 20 bishops and more.'

¹⁴³See especially Wood, 'The Making of King Aethelstan's Empire'; Laura Hibbard Loomis, 'The holy relics of Charlemagne and King Aethelstan', *Speculum* 25 (1950) 437-56; and Karl Leyser, 'The Ottonians and Wessex', in Leyser, *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries* (London: 1994), 73-104.

king from Britain before him, he was able to play 'hardball on the European stage',¹⁴⁴ although his involvement may have resulted in his taking his eye off the ball regarding events closer to home.

The main event of 937 is well known. An alliance led by Olaf king of Dublin and Constantín king of Alba moved to attack Æthelstan, and in the opening words of the well-studied poem which comprises the entry for 937 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:¹⁴⁵

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Her Æþelstan cyning, | eorla dryhten, |
| beorna beahgifa, | 7 his broþor eac, |
| Eadmund æþeling, | ealdorlangne tir |
| geslogon æt sæcce | sweorda ecgum |
| ymbe Brunanburh. ¹⁴⁶ | |

The battle attracted terse notice in the Welsh and Northumbrian annals,¹⁴⁷ and the 'Scottish Chronicle', but the *Annals of Ulster* also recorded a substantial account of the battle:

Bellum ingens lacrimabile atque horribile inter Saxones atque Norddmannos crudeliter gestum est, in quo plurima milia Nordmannorum que non numerata sunt, ceciderunt, sed rex cum paucis euassit, .i. Amlaiph. Ex altera autem parte multitudo Saxonum cecidit, Adalstan autem, rex Saxonum, magna uictoria ditatus est.¹⁴⁸

Historians' attentions regarding the battle of *Brunanburh* have focused on identifying the site, and despite dozens of suggestions, there has not yet been a completely satisfying answer. A consensus is growing, however, that the site was likely to have

¹⁴⁴I owe this comment to Julia Smith. Compare the comment of Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 344, that 'Between Offa and Cnut there is no English king who played so prominent or so sustained a part in the general affairs of Europe.'

¹⁴⁵For a recent study, which sets the poem alongside the development of 'Alliterative' charters, see Simon Walker, 'A Context for "Brunanburh"?', in Timothy Reuter, ed., *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages* (London, 1992), 21-39.

¹⁴⁶ASC 937. 'In this year King Athelstan, lord of nobles, dispenser of treasure to men, and his brother also, Edmund atheling, won by the sword's edge undying glory in battle round *Brunanburh*.'

¹⁴⁷HRA C reports the involvement of the king of Strathclyde on the side of Olaf and Constantín.

¹⁴⁸AU 937.6. 'A great, lamentable and horrible battle was cruelly fought between the Saxons and the Norsemen, in which several thousands of Norsemen, who are uncounted, fell, but their king, Amlaif, escaped with a few followers. A large number of Saxons fell on the other side, but Athelstan, king of the Saxons, enjoyed a great victory.'

been somewhere south of the Humber, and that Æthelstan faced the coalition as it struck south from York.¹⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the broader interpretational problems which the battle poses have played second fiddle to the site identification. Consequently, with the exception of Pauline Stafford's warning that 'few tenth-century victories guaranteed the future', few would disagree with the idea that *Brunanburh* 'was one of the most decisive in English history.'¹⁵⁰

There is, however, a case to be made that, far from being a decisive battle which was Æthelstan's crowning achievement, *Brunanburh* may have been a near-disaster, and at least 'close run thing' with dubiously important consequences. First, although it is clear that, on the side of Olaf and Constantín, casualties were severe, and included five kings, seven earls, and Constantín's own son, both Olaf and Constantín escaped the battle.¹⁵¹ Second, Æthelweard's account of Æthelstan's reign recorded that 'Igitur post annos tredecim facta est pugna immanis barbaros contra in loco Brunandune, unde et uulgo usque ad præsens bellum prænominatur magnum.'¹⁵² The memory of this 'great battle' a generation after the fact seems to underscore its severity. Third, the lack of any mention of Welsh involvement on Æthelstan's side raises the possibility that the invasion had resulted in a loss of grip on the western portion of his *imperium*.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹For recent investigations into the battle site, see Michael Wood, 'Brunanburh Revisited', *Saga Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 20 (1980) 200-17; Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), 515-25. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, vol. ii., 31-88, presents the fullest interpretation of the battle as a whole, but his use of the evidence, in particular the saga sources, is problematic.

¹⁵⁰Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), 33; Hart, *The Danelaw*, 517.

¹⁵¹ASC A 937. 'Pær geflemed wearð, Norðmanna bregu, nede gebeded, to lides stefne litle weorode; cread cneor <0>n flot, cyning ut gewat on fealene flod, feorh generede. Swilce pær eac se froda mid fleame co on his cyppe norð, Costontinus har hilderig, hreman ne þorfte mæcan gemanan.' 'There the prince of the Norsemen was put to flight, driven perforce to the prow of his ship with a small company; the vessel pressed on in the water, the king set out over the fallow flood and saved his life. There also the aged Constantine, the hoary-haired warrior, came north to his own land by flight.'

¹⁵²Campbell, *The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, 54. Translation Campbell, 55. 'After thirteen years a huge battle was fought against the barbarians at *Brunandun*, wherefore it is still called the 'great battle' by the common people.'

¹⁵³T. M. Charles-Edwards points out to me, however, that one would not expect any mention of Welsh involvement in the account in *AU*, as the convention would have been to omit mention of kings on the winning side. Yet one could in fact, as did Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, vol. ii., 73-4, argue for Welsh involvement on Olaf's side, as *Egil's Saga* reports the involvement of Welsh kings, including an Adil who could refer to Idwal. Caution would, however, seem the better approach in this case.

Finally, and most importantly, it is clear that Æthelstan's victory did not set a seal on the conquests and submissions he achieved; the battle may, in fact, have been a simple matter of survival.

At the least, *Brunanburh* marked the demise of Æthelstan's *imperium* over northern Britain, as Constantín's involvement, and that of the king of Strathclyde, was an obvious and unambiguous statement that they would not remain subordinate kings. More importantly, although he was able to intervene, albeit ineffectively, in continental politics again in 939, the battle clearly left Æthelstan in a weaker position closer to home, as illustrated by the events which followed his death.¹⁵⁴ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was conspicuously silent with regards to any untoward happenings, but the annals in the *Historia Regum* report a different story:

Ethelstanus rex obiit, cui frater suis Edmundus in regnum successit, quo anno rex Onlaf primo venit Eboracum, deinde ad austrum tendens, Hamtonam obsedit. Sed nichil ibi proficiens, vertit exercitum ad Tameweorde, et vastatis omnibus per circuitum, dum rediens ad Legraceastre perveniret, occurrit ei rex Edmundus cum exercitu. Nec erat pugna difficilis, quoniam duo archiepiscopi Odo et Wlstan placatis alterutrum regibus pugnam sedaverant. Pace itaque facta, terminus utriusque regni erat Wetlingastrete. Edmundus ad australem partem, Onlaf ad aquilonalem regnum tenuerunt.¹⁵⁵

Brunanburh was not, therefore, a long-term setback for Olaf, as he not only succeeded in capturing York, but rolled the boundary of the Æthelwulfing *regnum* back to that last seen before Edward had finalized his conquests. Although, as suggested below,¹⁵⁶ *Brunanburh* may have exercised the minds of both Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns in terms of something to be avoided in the future, it was not particularly significant otherwise.

¹⁵⁴EHD 316.

¹⁵⁵HRA C 939. 'King Athelstan died, and his brother Edmund succeeded him in the kingdom; and in this year King Olaf first came to York, and then, marching south, besieged Northampton. But accomplishing nothing there, he turned his army to Tamworth and ravaged everthing round about it. When he reached Leicester on his return, King Edmund met him with an army. There was no severe fighting, for the two archbishops, Oda and Wulfstan, reconciled the kings to one another and put an end to the battle. When peace had thus been made, the Watling street was the boundary of each kingdom. Edmund held the part to the south, Olaf the kingdom to the north.'

¹⁵⁶See below, 116.

Despite this, it would be wrong to belittle Æthelstan's broader achievements. The evidence establishes that he both built upon the earlier submissions of Welsh kings to the point that they were in regular attendance at his court, and probably demanded regular tribute of them as well. Equally significant is their involvement in Æthelstan's offensive military action against Constantín in 934. Taken together this amounts to evidence for the most thorough subordination of western Britain under any Æthelwulfing king; Alfred's overlordship had been more benign and less rigorous. As for the subordination of northern kings, the contemporary literary and charter evidence establishes that this occurred at least twice during Æthelstan's reign, in 927 and 934. This evidence serves as a useful baseline with which one can compare other instances of diplomacy which involved Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns. As such, it becomes clear that there are no other good cases to be made for the subordination of a Mac Ailpín under an Æthelwulfing, at least for the tenth century. Æthelstan's achievement was unique. In 934, after he had invaded northern Britain with an army which included Welsh kings, and brought Constantín back to court as a *subregulus*, Æthelstan could, with complete justification, have regarded himself as an 'emperor of Britain.' Although *Brunanburh* established that this was a fleeting achievement, Michael Wood was certainly on the right track when he compared Æthelstan with Charlemagne. It might be better, however, to look to a strict contemporary, and regard Æthelstan as an 'English Otto', or even better still, to reverse the comparison and think of Otto as a 'German Æthelstan.'¹⁵⁷ Both kings not only present ideal models of early medieval kingship in their dealings with the church, but also strove to build political communities based upon the submission of, and the extension of *imperium* over, many peoples and *regna*.

¹⁵⁷I owe this point to Simon Coates.

Chapter IV:

Competition and accommodation: the Æthelwulfing and Mac Ailpín *imperia* in the later tenth century

By the end of his [Edmund's] reign, however, he was - apparently securely - master of everything which his predecessor had also surveyed: he governed all England, and enjoyed *imperium* in Wales and Scotland.¹

David Dumville is exceptional among early medieval historians of Britain in applying 'imperial' terminology to a tenth-century political community.² Like most, however, he can be criticized both for using 'national' terms to describe the components of the *imperium*, and for including northern Britain within it. While claims to rule over all Britain were inherited from Æthelstan, and developed further, there was a gulf between Æthelwulfing rhetoric and reality. The competition of the Mac Ailpíns, who had established themselves as the most important dynasty in northern Britain certainly by Edmund's reign, make his claim, in a charter of 946, to be 'rex et primicerius totius Albionis',³ look hollow. The patchy evidence suggests, rather, that the Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns were developing separate spheres of influence, although their border is far better described as a large grey area than a fine line.⁴ The possibility that there was to be no border between them must be kept in mind as well, as the ultimate failure of a Scandinavian dynasty to establish a permanent presence at York was by no means inevitable. The integration of York into the Æthelwulfing realm does, however, leave us

¹David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), 173.

²The fullest exposition is by Eric John, *Orbis Britanniae and other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), 1-63, but, as we will see, he stretches the evidence too far. John was, however, remarkable in his time for his comment, at page v, that 'The main task as it appears to me is the study of the history of 'England' before the concepts of 'England' and 'English' even existed. I have at least made a beginning of the study of the early English, not as 'us', using the advantage of hindsight to decide what was important and what may be neglected, but as 'them', as a people as remote from us as the Azande or the Nuer.'

³S 509.

⁴I thus find myself in disagreement with Geoffrey Barrow, 'The Anglo-Scottish border', in Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London, 1973), 140, who calls for precise boundaries. This approach may work for the twelfth century, when there were only two serious teams in town, but not in the tenth, when spheres of influence were in rapid flux.

with a paradox; this success came at the cost of a restriction in wider political ambitions which is driven home by the events of Edgar's reign.

Despite the disastrous loss of York and the Five Boroughs which accompanied the opening of his reign, Edmund, like Æthelstan, employed titles in his charters advertising rule over wide areas. These charters do not, however, unlike those from Æthelstan's reign, seem to reflect changing political fortunes. By far the most common style used by Edmund, which was employed, with some variations and additions, well into the reign of his successor Eadred, was 'rex Anglorum ceterarumque gentium in circuitu persistentium'.⁵ This phrase was first used in one of Æthelstan's charters from 938, which styled him as 'basileus industrius Anglorum cunctarumque [sic] gentium in circuitu persistentium'.⁶ The term *basileus* was a common substitution for *rex* in Edmund's early charters, often twinned with the sobriquet *industrius*, and reflects a carryover from the usage in *S* 441.⁷ In other charters the sobriquet was applied, but along with the simpler title *rex*,⁸ another contains the Byzantine borrowing without the sobriquet,⁹ while one scribe chose to go whole hog and call Edmund 'basyleos industrius Anglorum rex'.¹⁰ More commonly up to 944, however, the simpler 'rex Anglorum' was used along with the phrase regarding the surrounding peoples.¹¹ From 944, this 'standard' style was almost consistently extended to read, 'rex Anglorum ceterarumque gentium in circuitu persistentium gubernator et rector', which perhaps recognizes a distinction between Edmund's internal *regnum* and external *imperium*.¹²

⁵*S* 471. 'King of the English and of the other peoples in the surrounding area.'

⁶*S* 441.

⁷*S* 460-3; *S* 480.

⁸*S* 465; *S* 474-5; *S* 481; *S* 488.

⁹*S* 470.

¹⁰*S* 485.

¹¹*S* 471; *S* 482; *S* 486-7; *S* 489; *S* 491-2; *S* 502; *S* 512. *S* 483 uses the interesting abbreviation 'rex Anglorum genciumque circumsistencium.'

¹²*S* 493-4; *S* 497; *S* 500-1; *S* 504; *S* 506; *S* 510; *S* 513. 'King of the English, and governor and ruler of the other peoples in the surrounding area.' *S* 508, from 946, is the anomaly, and reads 'basyleos Anglorum multarumque gentium in circuitu persistentium.'

A substantial minority of charters from Edmund's reign, while probably authentic, do not use the 'standard' styles described above. These fall into three general categories. First, four full 'Alliterative' charters, and two fragments thereof without surviving proems are extant for Edmund's reign.¹³ Three of these refer to Edmund in various forms of the style, archaic for this period, of 'King of the Anglo-Saxons', which had been used by Alfred and Edward, and in the early years of Æthelstan's reign.¹⁴ The second category are those in which Edmund is simply referred to as 'rex Anglorum' or some variation of this.¹⁵ Finally, there are those which make claims to Edmund's wide authority, but in 'non-standard' terms which range from the circumspect 'rex Anglorum et curagulus multarum gencium' of *S* 466 to the striking 'rex et primicerius tocius Albionis' of *S* 509.¹⁶ By far the most interesting aspect of the charters of Edmund's reign, however, is the innovation, in a number of charters from 940-43, of dating by an imperial year.¹⁷ One might dismiss other elements of charter proems as mere verbiage, as suggested by Henry Loyn, and perhaps most economically stated by Stenton in his comment that 'the attractiveness of words like *monarchus*, *basileus*, *curagulus*, and *imperator* produced eccentric styles into which many historians have read an assertion of imperial dignity by tenth-century English kings'.¹⁸ It does not, however, seem possible to dismiss examples of an usage which explicitly portray Edmund as the head

¹³*S* 472-3; *S* 479; *S* 484; *S* 1497; *S* 1606. Although the authenticity of these charters has been called into question in the past, there has been a general consensus since Whitelock's comments in *EHD*, 340, that they are not, as a group suspicious. See for example the comments in P. H. Sawyer, ed., *Charters of Burton Abbey* (Oxford, 1979), xlvii-xlviii, where he does note that either *S* 484 or *S* 1606 is likely a forgery. The consensus is well illustrated by the comments of Simon Walker, 'A Context for "Brunanburh"', in Timothy Reuter, ed., *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages* (London, 1992), 27-9, where he did not feel the need to address the question of authenticity.

¹⁴*S* 472-3; *S* 479. *S* 484 simply refers to him as *rex*.

¹⁵*S* 459; *S* 464; *S* 469; *S* 495; *S* 496; *S* 503.

¹⁶*S* 466-8; *S* 490; *S* 505; *S* 509.

¹⁷*S* 465; *S* 474-5; *S* 481; *S* 488; *S* 490; *S* 512. The formula is 'primo [or secundo or tercio] anno imperii mei.'

¹⁸Henry Loyn, 'The Imperial Style of the Tenth Century Anglo-Saxon Kings', *History* 40 (1955) 111-15, where he summarized the views of R. Drögereit, 'Kaiseridee und Kaisertitel bei den Angelsachsen', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, germanische Abteilung* 69 (1952), 1-73; F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (London, 1971), 353.

of an *imperium*, and in one case in a document which survives in a contemporary manuscript.¹⁹

Unlike in Æthelstan's reign, however, we are left with little evidence which supports the idea that Edmund's *imperium* existed on more than paper, although the absence of evidence/evidence of absence problem is acute. There is only one surviving witness list from Edmund's reign which records the attendance of a subordinate king at his court. This witness list is from the Latin version of *S* 1497, which, as it stands, represents the marriage of a fragment of an 'Alliterative' charter with a Latin abbreviation of a late tenth or early eleventh century Old English will which survives in a contemporary document.²⁰ A 'Eowel subregulus', almost certainly Hywel Dda, appears at the head of the secular witnesses, and the witness list as a whole is consistent with the later years of Edmund's reign.²¹ Excepting this piece of evidence, we are left with several, mostly disconnected entries in various narrative sources with which to come up with a picture of Edmund's relations with his neighbours.

A few of these do, however, come together in the years 941-2. The annals in the *Historia Regum* record that, in 941, Olaf [son of Guthfrith] died, and was succeeded by Olaf [son of Sihtric].²² Just as Olaf had exploited Æthelstan's death to make his successful bid to capture York and overrun the five boroughs, Edmund seemingly seized this moment. An entry, in alliterative verse, for the year 942 in versions *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* eloquently records his 'redemption' of Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham, Stamford, and Derby. Edmund's success may be connected, as has been suggested previously by a number of historians,²³ with the report, in the *Annales Cambriae*, that in 942 'Iudgual et filius ejus Elized a Saxonibus occiduntur.'²⁴

¹⁹*S* 512.

²⁰See Dorothy Whitelock, Neil Ker, and Lord Rennell, eds., *The Will of Æthelgifu* (Oxford, 1968), 38-9 for the text.

²¹Whitelock, *The Will*, 42-4, discusses the witness list, and concludes at 44 that 'A list of witnesses which hangs together as well as this one does is certainly genuine.'

²²*HRA* C 941; *ASC* E places Olaf's death in the next year.

²³The most sensitive analysis is by David N. Dumville, 'Brittany and <<Armes Prydein Vawr>>', *Etudes Celtiques* 20 (1983) 149-50.

²⁴*AC* 943 [recte 942], 'Idwal and his son Elised were killed by the Saxons'; see also *ByT* 942.

As Dumville put it, 'He [Idwal] may have remained aloof from the rival power-blocs but it is perhaps more likely that he was sucked, willingly or unwillingly, into the anti-English coalition; its defeat in 942 would have exposed him, in either event, to Edmund's wrath.'²⁵ This action would have, at the time, served as a reminder to other kings within Edmund's *imperium* that action against him would not be tolerated. Since Idwal had witnessed ten extant charters during Æthelstan's reign as a *subregulus*, these events should also serve as another warning to historians that a submission relationship was by no means permanent, but often lasted only as long as it could be enforced.

Edmund was able to exploit further instability in Northumbria and, probably in 944, captured York, a success which, as with Æthelstan before him, led to direct contact with a Mac Ailpín king to the north.²⁶ There are various accounts, ranging from the terse comment in the *Annales Cambriae* that 'Strat Clut vastata est a Saxonibus', to a full account in the *Flores Historiarum* of Roger of Wendover noting the involvement of a king from Dyfed, which record a northern expedition of Edmund in 945.²⁷ The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* records a visit by Edmund to Chester-le-Street in the course of the campaign which suggests that he, like his brother, recognized the ecclesiastical dimension of the situation.²⁸ The most crucial evidence, which not surprisingly displays Æthelwulfing bias, is from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which records:

²⁵Dumville, 'Brittany', 150.

²⁶Conflicting sources confound precise dating. *ASC* ABCD records Edmund standing as a baptismal sponsor to Olaf, one Northumbrian king, and a confirmation sponsor to another, Ragnald, in an undated entry which may belong to 943. All versions of the *ASC* record how in 944, 'Her Eadmund cyning geeode eal Norþhymbra land him to gewældan 7 aflymde ut twegen cyningas, Anlaf Syhtrices sunu 7 Rægenald Guðferpes sunu.' 'In this year King Edmund reduced all Northumbria under his rule, and drove out two kings, Olaf, Sihtric's son, and Ragnald, Guthfrith's son.' *HRA* C places the expulsion of Olaf in the year 943, and a further expulsion of two kings in 945. *AU* 944.3 records a sack of Dublin by Irish kings, and *AU* 945.6 records how Dublin was given up by a 'Blacair', who was succeeded by an 'Olaf' who is possibly one of those who had been expelled from Northumbria. Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, vol. ii. (Dublin, 1979), 107-25, perhaps unwisely brings order to the chaos.

²⁷*AC* 946 [recte 945]; *EHD* 257.

²⁸*HSC* §28.

Her Eadmund cing oferhergode eall Cumbra land 7 hit let eall to Malculme
Scotta cinge on þæt gerad þæt he wære his midwyrhta ægþer ge on sæ ge on
lande.²⁹

Dumville's interpretation is as follows, and is questionable on several points:

The kings of Scots had been showing an unhealthy interest in Strathclyde for seventy years; in conquering that British kingdom himself in 945, Edmund recognised the Scottish dimension by granting Strathclyde to King Mael Coluim mac Domnaill on what appear to have been an overlord's conditions.³⁰

First, it is not clear that Edmund 'conquered' Strathclyde. Both the Latin *vastata est* of the *Annales Cambriae* and the Old English *oferhergode* suggest ravaging or despoiling.³¹ Second, one must question whether Edmund was in a position to 'grant' Strathclyde to anyone. The chronicler states that Strathclyde was *let* to Máel Coluim, but it seems rather implausible that Edmund, who had only recently secured York, would be able to determine the fate of a kingdom on the basis of a mere ravaging; this statement in all likelihood represents the misinterpretation or wishful thinking of a partisan commentator.³²

Finally, one comes to Dumville's point that Edmund had imposed 'an overlord's conditions', but the chronicler noted that the terms were that Máel Coluim would be Edmund's *midwyrhta* on both on sea and land. *Midwyrhta* is an extremely uncommon term, but clearly represents a compound of *mid*, together with, with, or among, and *wyrhta*, a wright or worker. We might translate the term literally as 'together worker',

²⁹The text is from A, but is also in all other versions. 'In this year King Edmund ravaged all Cumberland, and granted it all to Malcolm, king of the Scots, on condition that he should be his ally both on sea and on land.'

³⁰Dumville, *Wessex*, 179. In discussing this matter with me, Dumville clarified that he used 'unhealthy' in the sense of 'predatory', and conceded that Æthelwulf's interest in Northumbria was equally 'unhealthy.'

³¹The verb *oferhergian* is, for example, used in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to describe Æthelstan's invasion in 934.

³²Benjamin T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (London, 1994), 83-5 also accepts the testimony of the entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and notes that the verb *let* 'suggests that it [the *let* of Strathclyde] was a temporary assignment rather than a permanent grant. Máel Coluim apparently was assigned the rights of the overlord due to Edmund. Among these rights was the collection of taxes. . .'. In Benjamin T. Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", *Scottish Historical Review* 77 (1998), 157ff, he writes that 'He [Máel Coluim] is mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under 945, when he allied with the English King Edmund in return for the *let*, or "assignment", of the taxes of Strathclyde.' This seems to push the evidence too far, as it represents two levels of interpretation of a term, which itself, may originally have been only an interpretation.

but Whitelock's economical translation 'ally' certainly captures the sense well. It is possible, as well that this term is a calque on the Latin term *cooperator*,³³ but the question of whether *midwyrhta* was a loan translation or new innovation is less relevant than the portrayal, in either case, of a reciprocal relationship. What is clear is that no evidence suggests that the agreement reached by Edmund and Máel Coluim in 945 was anything other than that between two kings operating on a theoretically level playing field, but we are left with few clues as to the motivation for both Edmund's expedition and the resultant diplomacy. While some of Hudson's interpretation is questionable, he is clearly on the right track to note that 'Máel Coluim was not a participant in that raid, but he was the main beneficiary'.³⁴ One might speculate that, in effect, Edmund was doing Máel Coluim's own dirty work, a favour which was returned, as suggested by Hudson, with assistance in 949 and 952.³⁵ What may be a better explanation is that the function of the meeting was for Edmund and Máel Coluim to respect their counterparts' spheres of influence, and that the mention of the '*let*' was a recognition of Strathclyde as part of the Mac Ailpín, not the Æthelwulfing sphere.³⁶ Support for such an agreement is, admittedly, indirect, but what is remarkable is the paucity of evidence for direct military confrontation between Mac Ailpíns and Æthelwulfings for more than a half century following *Brunanburh*,³⁷ rapprochement was desirable if a repeat performance, which would have been beneficial to neither party, was to be avoided.

Upon the succession of Eadred in 946, there is another, terser, reference to diplomatic contact between Mac Ailpíns and Æthelwulfings. The *Anglo-Saxon*

³³I owe this suggestion to T. M. Charles-Edwards.

³⁴Hudson, *Kings*, 84.

³⁵Hudson, *Kings*, 86. But see below, 131-2, for a different interpretation of the raid of c. 950.

³⁶But for the understandable use of the word 'kingdom', the comment of Stenton, 359, in this context that 'Edmund was enough of a statesman to realize the necessity of setting a limit [as opposed to a precise boundary as Barrow might argue] to his own kingdom in the north' is wholly agreeable.

³⁷It is difficult to pinpoint precisely where to guillotine this period of accommodation. ASC ABC records a ravaging of Strathclyde by Æthelred in 1000, Máel Coluim II (1005-1034) was engaged in a variety of localized military activity along his southern border, and ASC DEF suggest a northern expedition led by Canute, probably in 1031. There was not, however, to be another set piece battle until 1054, when Earl Siward defeated Mac Bethad, and by the time Máel Coluim III was contending with William the Conqueror's invasion of the north in 1072, both political communities had gone through several dynastic changes.

Chronicle reports how Eadred was able to bring Northumbria under his rule, and the chronicler concluded the entry for 946 with the comment that '7 Scottas him aþas sealdan, þæt hie woldan eal þæt he wolde.'³⁸ At first glance this is an unambiguous statement of Eadred's authority, but the partisan nature of the commentary must be taken into account. The chronicler is, of course, silent as to any oaths which Eadred might have made to the Scots, and it is possible to suggest a source from which the chronicler developed his interpretation. The first chapter of the undated law code III Edmund reads as follows:

Imprimis, ut omnes jurent in nomine Domini, pro quo sanctum illud sanctum est, fidelitatem Eadmundo regi, sicut homo devet esse fidelis domino suo, sine omni controversia et seductione, in manifesto, in occulto, et *in amando quod amabit, nolendo quod nolet*.³⁹

This italicized portion is almost certainly modeled on part of the first chapter of II Edward, which is, like III Edmund, also undated:

He agsode hy þa, hwa to ðære bote cyrran wolde 7 on ðære geferræddenne beon ðe he wære, 7 *þæt lufian ðæt he lufode, 7 ðæt ascunian ðæt he ascunode*, ægðer ge on sæ ge on lande.⁴⁰

While it is unlikely that the chronicler was directly relying on the law tracts, it is clear that he was presenting the diplomatic relationship in familiar, domestic terms. This is corroborated by the word for word usage of the 'sea and land' formula, first seen in II Edward, in the entry for the year 945, although the portrayal of Malcolm as Edmund's *midwyrhta* seems to betray the chronicler's knowledge that there was no simple triumph on Edmund's part. In 946, a report that oaths had been sworn may have suggested to the chronicler a parallel with the commendation oaths, found in the law

³⁸ASC ABCD 946 [text from A]. 'And the Scots gave oaths to him that they would agree to all that he wanted.'

³⁹A. J. Robertson, ed., *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge, 1925), 12. Translation Robertson, 13, 'In the first place, all shall swear in the name of the Lord, before whom that holy thing is holy, that they will be faithful to King Edmund, even as it behoves a man to be faithful to his lord, without any dispute or dissension, openly or in secret, favouring what he favours and discountenancing what he discountenances.'

⁴⁰F. L. Attenborough, ed., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922), 118. Translation Attenborough, 119, 'He asked which of them would devote themselves to this [work of] reformation and which of them would cooperate with him in his efforts, favouring what he favoured and discountenancing what he discountenanced, both by land and sea.' Robertson obviously noticed the parallel as well, and transparently modeled his translation upon that of Attenborough.

tracts, which formed part of the typical political language known to him.⁴¹ It is possible that the phrase 'hie woldan eal þæt he wolde', literally, 'they would all that he would', is a paraphrase of the passages in the laws italicized above, and there is a strong possibility that it represents a case of the chronicler interpreting, rather than reporting news. With other evidence lacking, it is a dangerously thin base on which to construct an argument for a 'submission' in 946.⁴²

Charters do, however, provide us with good evidence that Eadred was, like his predecessors, able to maintain an *imperium* over some of his other neighbours. As with the case of Æthelstan's reign, witness lists provide some of the most crucial evidence, which is summarized, along with the sole examples from the reigns of Edmund and Eadwig, in the following table. Brief discussion of each charter follows:

| Welsh', 'Bernician', and Scandinavian? subscriptions to the charters Edmund, Eadred, and Eadwig. | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------|-----------------|-------|----------|----------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| S # | Date | Location | Hywel | Morgan | Cadwgan? | Osulf | Owen | Sigurd | Iago |
| 1497 | 942x46 | Kirtlington, Ox | Eowel | | | | | | |
| 520 | 946 | Kingston, Sr | Howæl | Marcant | Cadmo | Osulf | | | |
| 544 | 949 ? | | Howæl | Morcant | Cadmon | Oswulf | | | |
| 546 | 949 ? | | | | | Osulf | | | |
| 550 | 949 ? | | Howæl | Marcant | | Osulf | | | |
| 552a | 950 | Abingdon, Brk | Howel | Morcante | | Osulf | | | |
| 566 | 955 ? | | | Morcant | | | Owen | Syfeð | Jacob |
| 633 | 956 | Cirencester, Gl | | Morgant | | | | | |

S 1497

See above, 113, for further discussion. The date 942x46 is the suggestion of Simon Keynes.⁴³

⁴¹On the importance of oaths in cementing personal lordship in the tenth-century Æthelwulfing political community, see Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), 83-9 especially.

⁴²Many thanks to T. M. Charles-Edwards for offering some important caveats against the interpretation presented above.

⁴³Simon Keynes, *An Atlas of Attestations in Anglo-Saxon Charters c. 670-1066* (forthcoming), Table XXVIII.

S 520

'Howæl regulus', Hywel Dda (d. 950), now king of both Dyfed and Gwynedd following the death of Idwal, leads the secular witnesses, who follow the bishops. He is immediately followed by 'Marcant' and 'Cadmo', to whom no title is assigned. 'Marcant' is probably Morgan ab Owain (d. 974) king of Morgannwg, who had witnessed eight charters in Æthelstan's reign, but 'Cadmo' poses an identification problem. J. E. Lloyd suggested that this was Cadwgan ab Owain, who, according to *Brut y Tywysogyon*, was killed by the 'Saxons' in 949, and Wendy Davies concurs.⁴⁴ Henry Loyn suggested that 'Cadmo' was 'probably Cadfan rather than Cadwgan', which may be what Simon Keynes had in mind when he commented that Cadmo was 'not Cadwgan ab Owain.'⁴⁵ There is no obituary for this 'Cadfan', but *Brut y Tywysogyon* does report the death of a son of a 'Cadfan' in 963.⁴⁶ The four witnesses who follow 'Cadmo' are uniformly styled *dux* in Eadred's non-alliterative charters, but here appear as *dux*, *aldermon*, *comes*, and *princeps*. 'Osulf', Osulf of Bamburgh, follows them, and is styled *Hægerefa*, or 'High-Reeve'.

S 544

The bishops follow Eadred in the witness list, and Eadred's mother Eadgifu heads the list of secular witnesses. She is immediately followed by 'Howæl regulus', and 'Morcant' and 'Cadmon' who, as in S 520, are not given any title. 'Oswulf ad bebbanbyrig hehgerefa' follows 'Cadmon', ahead of the leading ealdormen, who are styled variously *dux*, *eorl*, *comes*, *alderman*, and *princeps*.

⁴⁴ByT 949. 'A Chadwgawn vab Ywein a las y gan y Saeson'; J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, vol. i., 353; Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), 114.

⁴⁵Henry Loyn, 'Wales and England in the Tenth Century: the Context of the Athelstan Charters', *Welsh History Review* 10 (1980-1) 295; Keynes, *An Atlas*, Table XXXVI.

⁴⁶ByT 963. 'Ac y bu varw Meuruc vab Catuan.'

There has been a long controversy over the authenticity of this charter. Nicholas Brooks commented in 1992 that 'Scholars, including the present writer, have long dithered over whether to accept or reject the authenticity of the famous charter, still preserved in the cathedral archives, by which King Eadred granted Reculver to the cathedral church of Canterbury in that year - a charter which claims to have been both composed and written by Dunstan.'⁴⁷ His strong case for accepting the charter as 'an authentic original written by Dunstan himself' was not, however, the final word, as illustrated by Michael Lapidge's subsequent comments on the dating of the manuscript.⁴⁸ Keynes' measured assessment was that while there is a good case to be made for authenticity, the issue of whether it 'can be regarded as an original, whether or not in Dunstan's own hand, remains controversial.'⁴⁹ In any case, the witness list is in no way suspicious, and is notable because it is the only example from a charter which does not fall into the 'Alliterative' category which includes a subscription of Osulf, who appears at the head of a list of three *duces*.

S 550

'Howæl rex' and 'Morcant regulus' appear below the bishops, but are the only persons in the witness list who are given titles with the exception of Dunstan. 'Osulf bebbanbyrig' appears just below them.

S 552a

⁴⁷Nicholas Brooks, 'The Career of St Dunstan', in Nigel Ramsay *et al* eds., *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult* (Woodbridge, 1992), 17.

⁴⁸Brooks, 18; Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature 900-1066* (London, 1993), 185-6; see also David Dumville, 'English Square Minuscule Script: the Mid-Century Phases', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994) 146ff.

⁴⁹Simon Keynes, 'The "Dunstan B" charters', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994) 184ff.

Like S 418a, this charter is a recent discovery.⁵⁰ After the bishops and Eadred's mother Eadgifu, the witness list reads 'et Howel regulus cum Morcante.' As in other alliterative charters, the ealdormen are given a variety of titles, and four of them appear styled variously *comes*, *dux*, *aldorman*, and *eorl*, above 'Osulf Bebbanburg.' Hywel's presence on the witness list of a charter dated to 950 may help movement towards a definitive solution to the question of the date of his death, on which there is conflicting evidence. *Brut Y Tywysgyon* places his death in 949, as does *Annales Cambriae* after the correction required for this period. Annals in the *Historia Regum*, which do pose some chronological difficulties, place his death in 951, but the *Annals of Ulster*, which have the most reliable chronology in this period, report his obituary in 950 which, along with the evidence of the charter would seem to overrule the testimony of the Welsh annals.

S 566

Now the sole survivor of the *subreguli* who witnessed Æthelstan's charters, 'Morcant regulus' appears in the witness list below the bishops, Eadred's mother Eadgifu, and the Æthelings Eadwig and Edgar. Morgan is followed by an 'Owen', a 'Syferð', and a 'Jacob', all of whom can be plausibly identified. Loyn suggests that 'Owen' is Owain son of Hywel (d. 988), and 'Jacob' Iago son of Idwal (d. 979).⁵¹ Keynes suggests that 'Syferð' is the person of whom the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records in 962, '7 Sigferð cyning hine offeoll 7 his lic ligð æt Wimburnan.'⁵²

S 633

The witness list to this charter represents the sole piece of evidence for the attendance of foreign kings at Eadwig's court. 'Morgant regulus' appears below the bishops and 'Eadgar regulus', the king's brother, and ahead of three *duces*. Loyn suggested that the

⁵⁰It will be published in Cyril R. Hart, *Charters of Barking Abbey* (Oxford, forthcoming), and is available online at <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/users/sdk13/chartwww/Discoveries.html>.

⁵¹Loyn, 'Wales and England', 298; *ByT* 988; *ByT* 979.

⁵²*ASC* A 946. 'And King Sigferth killed himself, and his body is buried at Wimborne.' Whitelock, *EHD* 206, tersely and correctly, notes that 'Nothing more is known about him.'

mysterious 'Ast regulus' who appears above Edgar in the witness list was 'presumably the great Athelstan Half-King who normally subscribed as first among the ealdormen.'⁵³ Keynes comments, however, that, 'The conjunction *ast*, 'but', was much used by Aldhelm, and it too is used in the alliterative charters. . . in S 633 (956) the conjunction is promoted to the status of a sub-king ('Ast regulus'), evidently as the result of a copyist's carelessness or ignorance.'⁵⁴ 'Ast regulus' seems, then to be the figment of a scribe's incompetence.

At first glance, this evidence is not nearly as impressive as that for Æthelstan's reign, when *subreguli* witnessed over half of his extant charters between 928 and 935. In Eadred's reign, for example, only six of the roughly fifty surviving authentic charters contain subscriptions of subordinates who probably hailed from outwith his *regnum*. One might argue on this basis that visits of such persons to the Æthelwulfing court after 935 were infrequent and exceptional.⁵⁵ This would, however, be a hasty, and almost certainly erroneous conclusion to reach. With the exception of S 546, each of the charters with witnesses of interest is an 'Alliterative' charter, of which there are eleven extant examples for Eadred's reign.⁵⁶ Of these, in the six in which we see no 'foreign' witnesses, all appear to have an abbreviated witness list, and all but one explicitly state this fact.⁵⁷ S 548, for example notes that 'ceteri episcopi . duces abbates ministri . et milites' subscribed to the charter. One must, then, accept the strong

⁵³Loyn, 'Wales and England', 298.

⁵⁴Simon Keynes, 'King Athelstan's Books', in Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss, eds., *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1985), 157.

⁵⁵As I did in my first conference paper at Leeds in 1996. Many thanks to Simon Keynes for correcting this major interpretational blunder.

⁵⁶S 520; S 544; S 548; S 549; S 550; S 552a; S 556; S 557; S 566; S 569; S 572.

⁵⁷S 548; S 549; S 556; S 557; S 569; S 572. The exception is S 556. Cyril Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), 159 comments that 'Fortunately the witness list occurs in the body of the charter, and has thus escaped abbreviation by the scribe of the Red Book.' This did not, however, prevent the abbreviation of the other witness lists, which, with the exception of that in S 572, also occur in the body of the charter. It would appear that the witness list in S 556 is, as well, abbreviated, as it only records ten names, compared to the thirty-nine in S 552a, the 'Alliterative' charter with a full witness list which is closest in date to S 556.

probability that Hywel, Morgan, and others were originally present on these abbreviated witness lists, which most often only record the names of bishops.

This also raises the prospect that the absence of subscriptions by Welsh kings and others on charters, from 935 to 956, which do not belong to the 'Alliterative' category, should not be taken as evidence of their absence at court. As Simon Keynes will argue in his forthcoming book, the witness list of a charter did not necessarily represent an accurate report of those persons who were present when the charter was issued.⁵⁸ The scribe of the charter might abbreviate the witness list, not only for the sake of space, but to reflect his own view of who he thought were the most important members of the political community. The scribe of 'Æthelstan A', as established by his production of the longest surviving witness lists in early medieval charters from Britain, had an extremely inclusive idea of who was part of this political community. The scribes of the 'Alliterative' charters likewise did not limit themselves to recording the names of the most important members of the king's household, and the most important bishops and ealdormen within Eadred's *regnum*. A useful point of comparison is the subscriptions of abbots, who, like subordinate kings, appeared in large numbers, and in prominent positions, in the witness lists of 'Æthelstan A' charters. Abbots are, however, almost completely absent, if one excepts 'Alliterative' charters, from the witness lists of charters from 935 through to the beginning of Edgar's reign, although it certainly does not mean that they were absent from court. For both abbots and subordinate kings Loyn's assessment deserves repetition. 'We can fairly say that the surviving evidence is the tip of an iceberg'.⁵⁹

'Alliterative' charters are not, however, valuable merely for offering a glimpse of this iceberg, but for their striking expressions of the multi-ethnic nature of the mid-tenth-century Æthelwulfing *imperium*. One of the better known examples deserves to be quoted at length:

⁵⁸Simon Keynes, *The charters of King Æthelstan (924-39) and the Making of the Kingdom of the English* (forthcoming).

⁵⁹Loyn, 'Wales and England', 298.

Concedente gratia Dei anno dominicæ Incarnationis DCCCCXLVI, contigit post obitum Eadmundi regis, qui regimina regnorum, Angulsaxna et Norphymbra, Paganorum, Brettonumque septem annorum intervallo regaliter gubernabat, quod Eadred frater ejus uterinus, electione optimatum subrogatus, pontificali auctoritate eodem anno caðolice est rex et rector ad regna quadripartiti regiminis consecratus.⁶⁰

This idea of a 'quadripartite rule' over 'Anglo-Saxons', 'Northumbrians', 'Pagans', and 'Britons' seems to best express the way which the mid-tenth century Æthelwulfing kings wished to portray themselves, not as mere 'Kings of the English', but as the head of an *imperium* which had authority over many peoples. Crucially, there is a clear distinction made between 'Anglo-Saxons' and 'Northumbrians'. While a cleric might write in 927 of the 'completion of England'⁶¹ with Æthelstan's conquest of Northumbria, it is clear that this was not the only view.⁶² There are, granted, two 'Alliterative' charters from 951 in which Eadred is merely called 'rex Anglorum' in the proem, but in both cases he appears as 'rex Albionis' in the witness list.⁶³ Furthermore, in some other 'Alliterative' charters it is not *Angulsaxna* but *Anglorum* who are portrayed as distinct from *Norphymbra*.⁶⁴ Divisions within 'England' were quite clear.

The final point of interest regarding 'Alliterative' charters is their use of the terms *imperator* and *casere*. *Imperator* is one of the titles used in seven 'Alliterative' charters,⁶⁵ most often in the slightly varying styles 'rex Angulsæxna ond Nordhumbra imperator paganorum gubernator Brittonumque propugnator', and 'rex Anglorum gloriossimus rectorque Norþanhumbra et paganorum imperator Brittonumque

⁶⁰S 520. Translation Whitelock, *EHD*, 508, 'The Grace of god conceding in the year of our Lord's incarnation 946, after the death of king Eadmund, who royally guided the government of kingdoms, of the Anglo-Saxons and Northumbrians, of the pagans and the Britons, for a space of seven years, it happened that Eadred, his uterine brother, chosen in his stead by the election of the nobles, was in the same year by the pontifical authority orthodoxly consecrated king and ruler, to the sovereignty of the quadripartite rule.'

⁶¹'Quos iam regit cum ista perfecta Saxonum', see Michael Lapidge, 'Some Latin poems as evidence for the reign of Athelstan', *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981), 98.

⁶²This line in the 'Carta Dirige Gressus' poem is one of the main props upon which Dumville, *Wessex*, 170, builds his case for regarding Æthelstan as 'First King of England.'

⁶³S 556; S 557.

⁶⁴S 544; S 548; S 550; S 552a.

⁶⁵S 548-50; S 552a; S 569; S 572; S 633.

propugnator.⁶⁶ As the 'imperial' title is not given top billing in these examples, one might question whether they are making an 'imperial' claim. One is left in little doubt, however, of the scribe's intention when in 955, in the presence of several subordinate kings from Wales and another with a Scandinavian name, he described Eadred as 'Angul seaxna cyning 7 casere totius Brittaniae'.⁶⁷ Æthelwulfing imperial pretensions could not be expressed in clearer terms, nor would they be subsequently.

The bulk of surviving charters from Eadred's reign, while not nearly as much fun as the 'Alliterative' charters, at the least advertise his 'hegemonic' rule. Up to 949, they employ the same formula, 'rex Anglorum ceterumque gentium in circuitu persistentium gubernator et rector', used extensively in Edmund's reign.⁶⁸ There are also three charters, all from 947 and 948 which date by an imperial year.⁶⁹ After 949, a significant drop in charter production was accompanied by a shift in style, which reverted to the simple 'rex Anglorum'.⁷⁰ From 951 until the end of Eadred's reign the preferred title becomes 'rex et primicerius totius Albionis', which was first used in S 509, a charter of Edmund's reign dating to 946.⁷¹ The claim to authority over all Britain is, however, almost certainly aspirational rather than real. In those charters which name the various peoples within Eadred's *imperium*, Scots are conspicuously, and significantly absent.

The rise of the Mac Ailpín dynasty in northern Britain remains one of the enigmas of early medieval history, a process which Patrick Wormald has memorably

⁶⁶S 549, 'King of the Anglo-Saxons and emperor of the Northumbrians, governor of the pagans and defender of the Britons; S 550, 'The most glorious king of the English and ruler of the Northumbrians and emperor of the pagans and defender of the Britons.'

⁶⁷S 566. 'King of the Anglo-Saxons and Caesar of all Britain.'

⁶⁸S 517a; S 517b; S 518-19; S 522a; S 523-8; S 530-5; S 541-3; S 547; S 580; and with slight variations S 522.

⁶⁹S 517a; S 529; S 534. S 529 contains some unique formulation but is not suspicious.

⁷⁰S 545; S 551-3; S 558; S 578. 'gubernator et rector' is added in S 554.

⁷¹S 555; S 560-1; S 563-4; S 568; S 570. *Rex* is dropped from the formula in S 562, while a similar style, 'totius Albionis monarchus et primicerius' is used in S 546, which dates to 949.

described as 'the last major development of British prehistory'.⁷² The expansion of Æthelwulfing authority over southern Britain in the same period does offer some useful points of comparison. Equally, however, it provides some salutary warnings with regards to reading too much into fragmentary evidence which suggests either expansion of Mac Ailpín authority, or authority over other kings in northern Britain. Several examples from the later ninth century illustrate this point well. One might argue on the basis of the comment in the 'Scottish Chronicle'⁷³ that '[Cináed mac Ailpín] Et inuasit sexies Saxoniam et concremauit Dunbarre atque Marlos usurpata [est]'⁷⁴ that he was setting the stage for a later, and natural expansion. This would, however, ignore the subsequent comment, 'Britanní autem concremauerunt Dulblain atque Danari uastauerunt Pictauiam ad Cluanan et Duncalden',⁷⁵ which makes it clear that there was two-way traffic. Similarly, the report in the *Annals of Ulster* in 872 that 'Arthgha[l], rex Britanorum Sratha Cluade, consilio Custantini filii Cinaedho occisus est', may indeed signal a 'predatory' interest in Strathclyde. The succession of Eochaid, son of a 'Run regis Britannorum' [by a daughter of Kenneth mac Ailpín] to Constantín's own kingship in 878 could be taken,⁷⁶ however, as an indication that it could have been a dynasty based in Strathclyde, not in Fife, which was to dominate northern Britain. Finally, while Constantín seems to have been the first Mac Ailpín king to enjoy military success against Scandinavians, this was immediately followed by a reverse which was

⁷²Patrick Wormald, 'The Emergence of the *Regnum Scottorum*: A Carolingian hegemony?', in Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scotland in Dark Age Britain* (St. Andrews, 1996), 131.

⁷³In conjunction with Hudson's recent edition, Ian Cowan, 'The Scottish Chronicle in the Poppleton Manuscript', *Innes Review* 32 (1981) 3-21, remains a fundamental study of this text. There has also been a recent analysis in David Dumville, 'The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba', in Simon Taylor, ed., *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles* (Dublin, 2000), 73-86.

⁷⁴Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", 148, translation 152-3, 'And six times he [Kenneth mac Ailpín] invaded England; and he burned Dunbar; and also Melrose was seized.' The difference between the translation and interpretation of the term *Saxonia* is so fine here as to be almost nonexistent, and John Bannerman comments to me that 'Northumbria' is probably the better interpretation of the term than 'England' which, in a late ninth century context, has an anachronistic ring. Compare *AU* 918.4, 'for bru Tine la Saxanu Tuaiscirt', 'on the bank of the Tyne in northern Saxonland [Northumbria?]'.

⁷⁵Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", 148, translation 153, 'But the Britons [of Strathclyde] burned Dunblane, and the Danes ravaged Pictavia as far as Cluny and Dunkeld.'

⁷⁶Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", 149.

significant enough to attract notice in the *Annals of Ulster*.⁷⁷ Even his one success is chequered by the fact that it appears to have come in opposition to a tribute-taking exercise, which suggests that the Mac Ailpíns should be viewed, in the later ninth century, as subordinates of a Scandinavian overking.⁷⁸

By, or during, the reign of Constantín mac Cináed's nephew and namesake Constantín mac Aeda (d. 952),⁷⁹ it is clear, however, that the Mac Ailpín dynasty had come of age. He was a contemporary of four generations of the Æthelwulfing dynasty, and his reign of over forty years is of fundamental importance in understanding the political development of tenth-century Britain. His wider ambitions may have been made possible by a decline, or defeat of the Scandinavian threat. The 'Scottish Chronicle' reports an undated victory over *Danorios* during the reign of his predecessor Domnall, although it also records Domnall's death by the hand of *gentibus*.⁸⁰ The 'Scottish Chronicle' confirms that Constantín faced similar challenges early in his reign. 'Cuius tercio anno Normanní predauerunt Duncalden omnemque Albaníam. In sequenti utique anno occisi sunt in Sraith hErín Normanní'.⁸¹ This victory attracted notice elsewhere, as the *Annals of Ulster* record that in 904, 'Imhar ua hImhair do marbad la firu Fortrenn, 7 ár már n-imbi'.⁸² One victory is, of course, too simple an explanation for the expansion that was to follow, and one might point to the report two years later, in the 'Scottish Chronicle', of a new relationship between the dynasty and the church as either evidence of, or impetus for, a departure in Mac Ailpín strategy.⁸³

⁷⁷Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 148-9; AU 875.3.

⁷⁸Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 148, 'Tercio [decimo] iterum anno Amlaíb trahens census a Constantino occisus est', translation 154, 'Again, in the thirteenth year, Olaf, while taking tribute, was killed by Constantine.' As Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 148-9, has pointed out, there remain, however, difficulties with both the edition and translation of this passage in the text.

⁷⁹AU 952.1.

⁸⁰Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 149; AU 900.6 reports Domnall's death, but not its manner.

⁸¹Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 149, translation 155, 'In his third year the Northmen plundered Dunkeld and all Alba. Yet in the following year the Northmen were slain in Srathearn.'

⁸²AU 904.4. 'Ímar grandson of Ímar, was killed by the men of Fortriu, and there was a great slaughter around him.'

⁸³Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 150, 'Ac in vi anno Constantínus rex et Cellachus episcopus leges disciplinasque fideli atque fura ecclesiarum ewangeliorumque pariter cum Scottis in Colle Credulitatis prope regali ciúfate Scoan deuouerunt custodire; ab hac die collis hoc meruit nomen id est Collis Credulitatis', translation 155-6, 'And in the sixth year King Constantine and Bishop Cellach, on the Hill of Belief near the royal monastery of Scone, covenanted to guard the laws and disciplines

What is certain, however, is that by the second decade of the tenth century Constantín was not leading a dynasty fighting for its own survival, but one which had wider ambitions, as evidenced by his interventions in Northumbrian politics.⁸⁴ These wider ambitions are reflected in the shift, around this time, in the titles applied to Mac Ailpín kings. Cináed mac Ailpín and his immediate successors were all given the title 'rex Pictorum', upon their deaths, and the *Annals of Ulster* continued to refer to 'Picts' or 'men of Foirtriu' up to 904.⁸⁵ As has often been commented, however, Constantín's predecessor Domnall is the first to be called 'rí Alban',⁸⁶ but he may, in fact, have been given this title retrospectively. This would have had to happen at some point before the second decade of the tenth century, when the textual tradition of the 'Chronicle of Ireland', upon which the *Annals of Ulster* drew, split.⁸⁷ In a similar vein, Alex Woolf comments that the title 'rí Herenn uile', 'king of all Ireland'⁸⁸ which is given to Mael Sechnaill mac Mael Ruanaid, 'may reflect Flann [Sinna]'s aspirations in the early tenth century as much as his father's actual position.'⁸⁹ Whether or not, as does seem likely, 'rí Alban' was applied to Domnall retrospectively, or was the current usage, we are, however, left with the riddle of its meaning.

In the first instance, and it remained so up to the end of the ninth century 'Alba' was the Irish equivalent of the Latin 'Albion', referring to the island of Britain, although it has evolved in modern usage to refer to 'Scotland'.⁹⁰ Máire Herbert has, however, offered some interesting suggestions on the meaning of the terms 'rí Alban' and 'rí

of the faith and also the rights of the churches and gospels in like manner with the Scots; from this day the hill has deserved this name, that is the Hill of Belief.' For an interpretation of this entry in the broader context of ninth and tenth century ecclesiastical reform, see Thomas Clancy, 'Iona, Scotland and the Céili Dé', in Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scotland in Dark Age Britain*, (St. Andrews, 1996) 111-30, especially at 122-3.

⁸⁴See above, 67.

⁸⁵AU 858.2; AU 862.1; AU 866.1; AI 871.2; AU 876.1; AU 878.2; AU 904.4.

⁸⁶AU 900.6.

⁸⁷Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: an introduction to the Sources* (London, 1972), 114-5.

⁸⁸AU 862.5.

⁸⁹Alex Woolf, 'View from the West: an Irish Perspective on West Saxon Dynastic Practice', in N. J. Higham, and David Hill, eds., *Edward the Elder* (London, 2001), 89-101, at 91.

⁹⁰Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), 385-7.

Éirenn'.⁹¹ She argued that these titles were intended to mirror each other, and rather than being 'national', or even ethnic expressions, they were multiethnic terms, reflecting authority over many areas, where the two islands served as the linking denominator.⁹² As she put it, 'the island name *Alba* evidently provided a geographic common denominator for a politically-defined grouping which transcended other affiliations.'⁹³ We are faced, then, with the rather outlandish prospect, which may have fuelled, or been fuelled by ideas emanating from the Æthelwulfing court,⁹⁴ that from the 910's onwards Constantín's title was an implicit claim to rulership over all of Britain. It was, however, a useful title, since he was, like the Æthelwulfings, developing a political community which had no single ethnic component, but included a mishmash of 'British', 'English', 'Pictish', and 'Scottish' components. The record of the obituary of 'Etulbb, ri Saxan Tuaiscirt' in the *Annals of Ulster* in 913⁹⁵ may reflect a new interest in the rulers of northern Northumbria born out of a perception, existing even before there is evidence for Constantín's interest in Northumbrian affairs, that Eadwulf was part of this new political community.

It is traditional to include Strathclyde within the authority of the tenth-century Mac Ailpíns. In the wake of Hudson's neat editorial emendation of the line in the 'Scottish Chronicle' which was taken to indicate that the heir-presumptive, or 'elect' of the Mac Ailpíns was farmed out to Strathclyde, one is left, however, with a fairly threadbare case.⁹⁶ There was certainly interest in Strathclyde, as illustrated by the

⁹¹Máire Herbert, 'Rí Éireann, Rí Alban, kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', in Simon Taylor, ed., *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297* (Dublin, 2000), 62-72, 69-72 especially.

⁹²A possible precedent in Irish annals for this idea of rulership over geographic areas is seen in *AU* 873.3, which records, 'Imhar, rex Nordmannorum totius Hiberniæ et Britannie, uitam finiuit.' 'Imhar, king of the Norsemen of all Ireland and Britain, ended his life.'

⁹³Herbert, 'Rí Éireann, Rí Albann', 69.

⁹⁴Asser did address Alfred as 'omnium Britanniae insulae Christianorum rectori', but the concept of rulership over all of Britain was not raised again until after the first instances of contact between Æthelwulfings and mac Ailpíns in the 920s.

⁹⁵*AU* 913.1.

⁹⁶Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Elech and the Scots in Strathclyde', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 15 (1988) 145-9. The traditional case rested upon the expansion, of *elig* to *eligatur* in the report of the death of 'Duneualdus filius Ede rex Elig', Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 150. Hudson has shown, however, that this is a report of the death of Domnall mac Aeda, king of Ailech, which is recorded in *AU* 915.2.

record of an obituary in the 'Scottish Chronicle', which cannot be dated any more precisely than 908x915, of an otherwise unknown 'Donéualdus rex Britanniorum'.⁹⁷ The kings of Strathclyde do appear below Constantín in the records of the meetings in 920 and 927, and in the witness list to S 1792, but while lesser prominence may establish relative power, one cannot argue for subordination on this basis. One might, as well, read an attempt to break away from Constantín's control into Owen's attendances at Æthelstan's court, in Constantín's absence, in 931 and December 935. In the latter case, however, Owen's appearance above the Welsh *subreguli* suggests that he was a king to be reckoned with, even if he was not as powerful as Constantín.⁹⁸ Northern sources claim that Owen was, with Constantín, a target of Æthelstan's invasion in 934, and place them together, yet again, at Brunanburh in 937.⁹⁹ All this evidence is compatible with the idea that Owen was Constantín's subordinate, but neither does it come close to establishing it. An equally plausible idea is that they were merely allies, until the changed circumstances of the 940s led to a new departure in Mac Ailpín policy: accommodation with Æthelwulfings.

The kings in Bamburgh faced an even more complex set of challenges and opportunities than the kings of Strathclyde. Constantín may have been a natural ally and relatively benign overlord in the 910s, but all bets were off following Æthelstan's conquest of York in 927. Ealdred, subscribing as a *dux* was clearly viewed in a different light than the *subreguli* at court, and one may have to accept that because he was 'English', there was an intention to bring him within the *regnum* rather than the *imperium* of Æthelstan's realm. Still, the recognition of his regal status by an Irish annalist in 934 does suggest that whatever the theory of his inclusion within Æthelstan's political community, outsiders recognized a difference in practice.¹⁰⁰ The return of a Scandinavian king to York in 939 seems, in retrospect, like a good

⁹⁷Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", 150.

⁹⁸S 413; S 434-5.

⁹⁹*Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*, in Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, vol. i. (London, 1882), 76; HRA C 937.

¹⁰⁰Denis Murphy, ed. *The Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Dublin, 1896), sub anno 928 [recte 934].

opportunity for Constantín to reassert some authority over Osulf, but the evidence suggests that it was an opportunity which Constantín failed to grasp. The annals in the *Historia Regum* record how in 941, 'Olilaf vastata ecclesia Sancti Balteri et incensa Tiningaham, mox periit. Unde Eboracenses Lindisfarnensem insulam depopulati sunt, et multos occiderunt'.¹⁰¹ On this occasion, however, Constantín was unable, or unwilling to play the role of a *propugnator*, as he had, with mixed success, when the same area had been threatened by Ragnald in the 910s. Osulf may, in fact, have had to deal with the worst of all worlds with a hostile dynasty based in York, and a Mac Ailpín king to the north who was still intent on setting his stamp on northern Northumbria.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Osulf might find the lordship of the Æthelwulfing king a more attractive prospect, as evidenced by his attendance at court in 946, and on at least four occasions in the period 949-50.¹⁰² Whether deliberately or not, the attendances in 949-50 coincided with a raid on northern Northumbria by Constantín's successor Máel Coluim which, although it is noticed only in the 'Scottish Chronicle', appears to have been quite severe:

In vii^o anno regní suí [Máel Coluim] predauít Anglos ad amnem Thesis et multitudinem rapuit hominum et multa armenta pecorum quam predam uocauerunt Scotti predam Albi Do[r]sorum idem n[-]janni Disi.¹⁰³

Hudson interprets this raid as part of a *quid pro quo* agreement between the Mac Ailpíns and Æthelwulfings; Máel Coluim, by raiding the lands of the king of York, was reciprocating for Edmund's raid on Strathclyde in 945.¹⁰⁴ While there may have been an agreement along these lines in place, interpreting this raid within that context does not, however, seem to square with the reality of tenth-century Northumbria political geography. 'Northumbria' in the sense of a single kingdom which stretched from south

¹⁰¹*HRA* C 941. 'Olaf, when he had ravaged the church of St. Bealdhere and burnt Tynningame, soon perished. Therefore the men of York laid waste the island of Lindisfarne and killed many people.'

¹⁰²*S* 520; *S* 544; *S* 546; *S* 550; *S* 552a.

¹⁰³Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 150-1, translation 158, 'In the seventh year of his kingship he [Máel Coluim] plundered the English as far as the River Tees, and seized a multitude of people and many herds of cattle; the Scots called this raid "the raid of the white ridges", the same as to the River Tees.' Constantín had abdicated c. 943, so this raid can be dated c. 950.

¹⁰⁴Hudson, *Kings*, 86-7.

of York to the Firth of Forth ceased to exist from the conquest of York in 867, when the kingdom reverted into its old constituent parts, with a Scandinavian dynasty probably based at York, and a native dynasty, from which Eadwulf, Ealdred, and Osulf may have descended, based at Bamburgh. Kings based at York might continue to be called 'kings of the Northumbrians', but they were kings of a much smaller 'Northumbria' than that which existed from the seventh through the ninth centuries. One cannot assume therefore, that an attack on the old northern half of Northumbria, which that of c. 950 clearly is, as evidenced by the comment that Mael Coluim raided as far as the Tees, was directed at the incumbent in York.¹⁰⁵ This seems, rather, to have been a forceable tribute-taking exercise directed against Osulf's lands.

How one views Osulf's last appearance in the historical record, the statement that 'Comes Osulf suscepit comitatum Northanhymbrorum', an event which the annals in the *Historia Regum* place in 953,¹⁰⁶ depends to a large extent on one's interpretation of Northumbrian chronology in the 950s. This was the subject of a recent, revisionist article by Peter Sawyer, who argued that the date for the final expulsion of the kings of the Scandinavian kings of York should be placed in 952, and not 954 as has been traditionally assumed.¹⁰⁷ Sawyer presented a fine analysis of the surviving 'English' chronicle sources, but did not take into account an entry in the *Annals of Ulster* for 952, which may be relevant to the issue, and reads, 'Cath for firu Alban 7 Bretnu 7 Saxanu ria Gallaibh.'¹⁰⁸ One would expect that the *Bretnu* mentioned were from Strathclyde, but one wonders where the *Saxanu* who were part of the coalition hailed from. They may have been from northern Northumbria, but one must also accept the

¹⁰⁵This interpretational flaw was also displayed by Dorothy Whitelock, and almost everyone who has followed her, in an essay which, although it is over forty years old, is still essential reading. Dorothy Whitelock, 'The Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', in Peter Clemoes, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1959), 70-88.

¹⁰⁶*HRA* C 953. 'Earl Oswulf received the earldom of the Northumbrians.'

¹⁰⁷Peter Sawyer, 'The Last Scandinavian Kings of York', *Northern History* 31 (1995) 39-44.

¹⁰⁸*AU* 952.2. 'The foreigners won a battle over the men of Scotland and the Welsh and the Saxons.' Colmán Etchingham, 'Early Medieval Irish History', in Kim McCone and Katharine Simms, eds., *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth, 1996), 142, commented that the editors of the *Annals of Ulster* adopted 'an approach to translation which is, at times, perplexing', and this is one of the perplexing occasions. It is far better, here, to translate 'the men of Alba and the Britons.'

possibility that they were Æthelwulfing forces from southern Britain who had joined, or were leading a campaign to oust the Scandinavian king of York.¹⁰⁹ The fact that, in 952, there was a Scandinavian army in Britain powerful enough to defeat a coalition must raise questions about Sawyer's proposed re-dating of the ultimate Æthelwulfing capture of York. Whatever the timing of this success, however, it is clear that Osulf was the ultimate beneficiary; perhaps attendance at Eadred's court during the difficult years of 949 and 950 had paid off. While he could not claim the regal status of his predecessors, he was probably, after Eadred, the most important person within the Æthelwulfing political community.

This southward re-orientation of focus did not, however, come without cost, as the 'Scottish Chronicle' records that during the reign of Mael Coluim's successor Indulf [954-62], 'In huius tempore opidum Eden vacuatum est ac relictum est Scottis usque in hodiernum diem.'¹¹⁰ This is the clearest indication, after the expansion and conflict of the Æthelwulfing and Mac Ailpín dynasties over the first half of the tenth century, that their respective spheres of influence were becoming more precisely defined. Indulf could not, as Constantín had attempted, extend his *imperium* over northern Northumbria, especially since Osulf had thrown his lot in with the Æthelwulfings. He could, however, absorb into his *regnum* an important area which Osulf could no longer tenably hold. Ultimately, however, the success of both Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns may have been born in the realization, perhaps in 945, that far more was to be gained by cooperation than conflict. Mael Coluim's action against the 'foreigners' in 952 also raises the prospect that he had realized, like the Æthelwulfings, the benefits of eliminating the 'middle kingdom' in Britain, which left only two main political contenders standing.

¹⁰⁹The plausible interpretation of Hudson, *Kings*, 87, assumes this.

¹¹⁰Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 151, translation 159, 'In this time Edinburgh was evacuated, and was abandoned to the Scots down to the present day.'

For the century after the 950s historians are left, however, with only disconnected pieces of evidence with which to determine how these two political contenders interacted, as the sources are not nearly as good as those for the first half of the tenth century. Ironically, however, the most famous incident of early medieval diplomacy or submission in Britain, when Edgar was supposedly rowed down the river Dee by his eight subject kings, occurred in the latter part of the tenth century. John of Worcester, writing in the early twelfth century, recorded the events of 973 as follows:

Rex Anglorum pacificus Eadgarus anno etatis sue .xxx., indictione .i., .v. idus Mai, die Pentecostes, a beatis presulibus Dunstano et Oswaldo et a ceteris totius Anglie antistitibus in ciuitate Acamanni benedicitur et cum maximo honore et gloria consecratur et in regem unguitur. Interiecto deinde tempore ille cum ingenti classe, septentrionali Brytannia circumnauigata ad Legionum Ciuitatem appulit, cui subreguli eius .viii., Kynath, scilicet rex Scottorum, Malcolm rex Cumbriorum, Maccus plurimarum rex insularum, et alii .v., Dufnal, Siferth, Huuual, Iacob, Iuchil, ut mandarant, occurrerunt et quod sibi fideles et terra et mari cooperatores esse uellent, iurauerunt. Cum quibus die quadam scapham ascendit, illisque ad remos locatis, ipse clauum gubernaculi arripiens, eam per cursum fluminis De perite gubernauit, omnique turba ducum et procerum, simili nauigio comitante, a palatio ad monasteriam sancti Iohannis baptiste nauigauit. Vbi facto oratione, eadem pompa ad palatium remeauit. Quod dum intraret optimatibus fertur dixisse tunc demum quemque suorum successorum se gloriari posse regem Anglorum fore, cum tot regibus sibi obsequentibus potiretur pompa talium honorum.¹¹¹

Historians, mostly engaged in debate on 'Anglo-Scottish relations', have had a great variety of views regarding this story, which range from its acceptance at face value to a denial of its historicity.¹¹² What is by far the most influential piece of work in recent years relating to the incident in 973 came not, however, from the pen of someone

¹¹¹JW 973. 'Edgar, the peaceable King of the English, was blessed, crowned with the utmost honour and glory, and anointed king in his thirtieth year at Pentecost, 11 May, in the first indiction, by the blessed bishops Dunstan and Oswald, and by the other bishops of the whole of England in the city of Bath. Then, after an interval, he sailed round the north coast of Wales with a large fleet, and came to the city of Chester. Eight underkings, namely Kenneth, King of the Scots, Malcolm, King of the Cumbrians, Maccus, king of many islands, and five others, Dufnal, Siferth, Hywel, Iacob, and Iuchil, went to meet him, as he had commanded, and swore that they would be loyal to, and co-operate with, him by land and sea. With them, on a certain day, he boarded a skiff; having set them to the oars, and having taken the helm himself, he skilfully steered it through the course of the River Dee, and with a crowd of ealdormen and nobles following in a similar boat, sailed from the palace to the monastery of St John the Baptist, where, when he had prayed, he returned with the same pomp to the palace. As he was entering it he is reported to have declared to his nobles at length that each of his successors would be able to boast that he was king of the English, and would enjoy the pomp of such honour with so many kings at his command.'

¹¹²See above, 3-5.

interested in the internal politics of Britain, but from that of Jinty Nelson,¹¹³ who was drawn to the problem of Edgar's "delayed" or "deferred" consecration at Bath in 973.¹¹⁴

Nelson argued that, in fact, there was not a 'delayed' or 'deferred' consecration at Bath, as she offered 'positive, if indirect, evidence' that Edgar had been consecrated earlier in his reign.¹¹⁵ She continued, arguing against the conclusions of Richardson and Sayles:¹¹⁶

Clearly the rite at Bath was not just a *Festkrönung* but an inauguration, because Edgar was certainly anointed then (and no *Festkrönung* ever involved a repeated anointing). But an inauguration to what? On my argument, Edgar had already been ritually inaugurated to his Anglo-Saxon realm. Continental parallels show, however, that new inaugurations, including anointing, were perfectly in order - didn't the Old Testament offer the precedent of David? - when a king acquired new realms.¹¹⁷

This of course begged the question of the new realm in 973, and Nelson went on to argue that the location of the coronation, Bath, was intended evoke a connection with the imperial past. The 'new realm' was therefore an *imperium* over the other peoples in Britain, as invoked by Byrthferth of Ramsey, the author of the *Vita Oswaldi* in comments which paralleled Luke 2:1.¹¹⁸ Nelson buttressed her case with eight points which, she argued, supported the idea that imperial ideas 'were finding expression precisely in the early 970s.'¹¹⁹

First, she noted that the special coin issue at Bath in 973, 'could have been produced partly for the purpose of an imperial *sparsio*',¹²⁰ and highlighted the effect which the general coinage reform of 973 must have had throughout the Insular World.

¹¹³Janet L. Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', in Janet L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), 296-303.

¹¹⁴Nelson, 'Inaugurations Rituals' 296.

¹¹⁵Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 299-300.

¹¹⁶H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The Governance of Medieval England* (Edinburgh, 1963), 397-412.

¹¹⁷Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 300.

¹¹⁸Nelson, 300-302; On the *Vita Oswaldi*, see Michael Lapidge, 'Byrthferth and Oswald', in Nicholas Brooks and Catherine Cubitt, eds., *St. Oswald of Worcester: Life and influence*, (London, 1996), 64-83.

¹¹⁹Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 302.

¹²⁰Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 302.

Second, she commented on the 'unprecedented' provisions in the law code Edgar IV, which can possibly be dated to this period, which noted that the laws were to apply to many peoples.¹²¹ Third, citing Roger of Wendover, she noted the 'submission' of Kenneth to Edgar, and the 'cession to him of Lothian under Edgar's lordship'.¹²² Fourth, she accepted that there was a 'ritual' in 973 when 'eight "sub-kings" rowed Edgar along the river Dee. . . all members of a pan-Brittanian alliance who presumably were also participants in Edgar's annual naval exercises around the coasts of Britain'.¹²³ Fifth, she noted 'the imperial styles in charters which, though not new, become now very prominent'.¹²⁴ Sixth, she suggested that the architectural innovation of westworks in late tenth-century English churches may have been introduced for the introduction of 'imperial liturgical performance' along the lines of Carolingian or Ottonian models. Seventh, citing Deshman's important study,¹²⁵ she commented on the 'new and specifically imperial iconography of Christ'¹²⁶ in the Benedictional of Æthelwold, which dates to c. 971x975. Finally, she highlighted a innovation in the *Ordo* which she argued was used in 973, which altered the prayer which followed investiture with the sceptre to 'Honour him above *all kings of Britain*'.¹²⁷ Nelson concluded this impressive survey of the evidence with the comment that:

None of these bits of evidence in isolation might mean much; but cumulatively they show that a case can be made (not a new case, certainly, but stronger than previously realised) for seeing in 973 an imperial inauguration rite and Edgar in his later years as ruler of a British Empire, tenth-century style.¹²⁸

¹²¹Robertson, *The Laws*, 32-3: 'Sy þeahhwæðere þes ræd gemæne eallum leodscype, ægðer ge Englum ge Denum ge Bryttyn, on ælcum ende mines anwealdes', 'The following measure, however, shall apply generally to the whole nation - to the English, Danes and Britons in every part of my dominion'; Robertson 38-9, '7 ðas eaca sy ús eallum gemæne þe on ðisum iglandum wuniað', 'But this addition shall apply generally to all of us who dwell in these islands.'

¹²²Nelson, 'Inaugurations Rituals', 302.

¹²³Nelson, 302-3. The supposed yearly circumnavigation of Britain by Edgar's fleets is discussed by Matthew Strickland, 'Military Technology and Conquest: the anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1996) 376-7.

¹²⁴Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 303.

¹²⁵R. Deshman, 'Christus rex et magi reges: Kingship and Christology in Ottonian and Anglo-Saxon Art', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976) 367-405.

¹²⁶Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 303.

¹²⁷Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 303.

¹²⁸Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 303.

Four years after the initial publication of Nelson's piece her case for an 'imperial inauguration' was, however, challenged on all its fundamental points in an article by Adrienne Jones.¹²⁹ Jones noted:

Firstly, as already stated, there is no evidence to support the thesis of an earlier anointing. Secondly, not only does the Chronicle give no hint that the consecration of 973 had an imperial character, but, more significantly still, the coronation *ordo* itself shows no trace of an imperial orientation. And thirdly, the vital impulse which could have warranted an *imperial* unction - a substantial extension of Edgar's rulership in the years immediately leading up to the ceremony at Bath - was lacking. Edgar's achievement was far more that of the peaceful consolidation of what had been established by earlier kings than of conquest and territorial expansion. Furthermore, the 'imperial' tendency of some of Edgar's titles only indicates the perpetuation of a tradition begun at least as early as the time of Athelstan.¹³⁰

To be completely fair to Nelson one would have to amend 'no evidence' to 'little evidence' in Jones' first point, and 'no trace' to 'little trace' in her second, but her third point underlines the fundamental flaw in Nelson's argument. That Nelson's piece should enjoy enthusiastic re-citing in comparison with the neglect of Jones' article underlines the need, however, for a closer examination of Nelson's evidence.

Nelson's first piece of evidence, the coinage, on which there is now a detailed study, is a case in point.¹³¹ While it is certainly possible, as Dolley argued, that the large number of 'Circumscription Cross' coins from Bath should be associated with Edgar's coronation, Stewart Lyon has commented that 'Wallingford is an equally exceptionally active mint in Circumscription Cross.'¹³² Furthermore, even if Dolley's views are accepted, it does not necessarily follow that this would support the case for an 'imperial' coronation. More importantly, however, the evidence of the coinage reform in 973 undermines, rather than supports the idea of an 'imperial' coronation. As discussed above, titles on coins were an outward-looking expression of the king's authority, hence

¹²⁹ Adrienne Jones, 'The Significance of the Regal Consecration of Edgar in 973', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (1982) 375-90.

¹³⁰ Jones, 'The Significance', 381-2.

¹³¹ Kenneth Jonsson, *The New Era: the Reformation of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage*, (Stockholm, 1987).

¹³² Michael Dolley, 'The Edgar millenary: a note on the Bath mint', *Seaby's Coin and Medal Bulletin* (May, 1973) 156-9; Pauline Stafford, 'Historical implications of the regional production of dies under Æthelred II', *British Numismatic Journal* 48 (1978) 40ff.

the significance of the initial use of the title 'Rex totius Britanniae' on coins during Æthelstan's reign. In the coinage reform of 973, however, Edgar took a step backwards and introduced the uniform title 'Rex Anglorum' on all his issues.¹³³ This would be a very odd development indeed if what occurred at Bath was an 'imperial' coronation, so the numismatic evidence must weigh heavily against any argument along those lines.

The other evidence which Nelson offers does not seem to tip the balance. Her comments on Kenneth's 'submission' and the 'cession to him of Lothian under Edgar's overlordship' rely on Roger of Wendover, whose account, as we will see, was derived from a far less elaborate Durham source, the *Libellus de primo adventu Saxonum*, which itself dates to the early twelfth century. The story of the rowing on the Dee, likewise, does not appear before the twelfth century, and the account in the D manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which may be near-contemporary, does not suggest a 'submission.' The evidence which Nelson gathered regarding 'imperial' ideas at Edgar's court cannot, however, be dismissed. Her error seems to be in the assumption that this is a peculiar develop of Edgar's reign which can be dated 'precisely in the early 970s.'¹³⁴ She is correct to state that the political ideas which are displayed in Edgar's charter styles 'did not grow in a vacuum', but understates the fact that the initial development of these titles had occurred over forty years earlier. 'Imperial' ideas were not avant-garde, but *de rigueur* by Edgar's reign, so it is a natural development that the rhetoric first displayed in charters would also appear, as Nelson has argued, in law, architecture, art, and liturgy. It would take far better evidence to establish, however, that the smoke of these expressions of imperial ideology represented the bonfire of an imperial coronation. Jones is probably correct in recognizing the significance of Edgar's consecration in the parallels with episcopal consecration which would have been evoked by consecration in his thirtieth year.¹³⁵

¹³³Jonsson, *The New Era*, 87-93.

¹³⁴Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', 302.

¹³⁵Jones, 'The Significance', 383-90. For further analysis, see Robert Deshman, *The Benedictional of Æthelwold* (Chichester, 1995).

It is possible, then, and indeed desirable, to divorce the two main historical problems of 973, Edgar's coronation and what did or did not happen at Chester, from each other.¹³⁶ In the second case, however, we are faced with an extremely large dossier of evidence, none of which is strictly contemporary, and on this basis a case has been made against the historicity of the event.¹³⁷ It is a respectable case, as no mention of a meeting at Chester is made by the *A*, *B* or *C* manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which merely include a long account, in alliterative verse, of his consecration. Furthermore, the accounts of Edgar's reign in the *D* and *E* manuscripts, which both date to the eleventh century, were clearly drawn up in retrospect, as eulogies appear not only in the year of his death, but in the year of his succession. Each eulogy alleges success for Edgar in the foreign sphere:

7 God him eac fylste, þæt cyningas 7 (h)eorlas georne him to bugan, 7 wurdon underþeodde to þam ðe he wolde, 7 butan gefeohte eall he gewilde þæt he sylfe wolde.¹³⁸

Cuð wæs þæt wide geond feola þeoda, þæt afaren Eadmundes ofer ganetes beð cynegas hyne wide wurðodon swiðe, bugon to þam cyninge, swa him wæs gecynde.¹³⁹

It is telling, however, that the eulogy common to the contemporary *A*, *B*, and *C* manuscripts makes no report of authority over foreign kings.

Despite the clearly retrospective views of Edgar's reign found in the eulogies, there is nothing suspicious, excepting endemic misdating which was likely introduced by a later editor, about five entries dated from 965 to 972 in the *D* and *E* manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. They do not appear to have been subject to later tampering,

¹³⁶For alternate views of the incident at Chester, which present views not necessarily mutually exclusive to those presented here, see David E. Thornton, 'Edgar and the eight kings, AD 973: *textus et dramatis personae*', *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2001) 49-79, who offers an exhaustive discussion of the texts and (possible) persons involved, and Julia Barrow, 'Chester's earliest regatta? Edgar's Deering revisited', *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2001) 81-93.

¹³⁷Hudson, *Kings*, 97-99.

¹³⁸ASC D 959. 'And God also supported him so that kings and earls willingly submitted [bowed] to him and were subject to whatever he wished. And without battle he brought under his sway all that he wished.'

¹³⁹ASC D 975. 'It was widely known throughout many nations across the gannet's bath, that kings honoured Edmund's son far and wide, and paid homage [bowed] to this king as was his due by birth.'

so the entry recorded under 972, which must be corrected to 973, is probably the witness which is most closely contemporary to the events of that year. As such, it must serve as the starting point into an investigation of what occurred at Chester in 973. It reads:

Her wæs Eadgar æþeling gehalgod to cyninge on pentecostenes mæssedæg on .v. idus Mai, þy .xiii. geare þe he on rice feng, æt Hatabapum, 7 he wæs þa ane wana .xxx. wintre. 7 sona æfter þam se cyning gelædde eall his scipfyrde to Leiceastre, 7 þær him comon on gearum .vi. cyningas, 7 ealle wið hine getreowsodon þæt hi woldon efenwyrhtan beon on sæ 7 on lande.¹⁴⁰

Two similarities between this entry, and that for the year 945 stand out. First, one sees the use of the term *wyrhta*, in a compound, to describe the relationship between the Æthelwulfing king and those who he met. In this case however, the term applied, *efenwyrhtan*, literally 'even-workers', is even less ambiguous than that used in 945, *midwyrhta*, 'together-worker', in its evidence that no submission is implied.¹⁴¹ Second, one sees in the entry for 973 a re-use of the 'sea and land' phrase, which implies a renewal of the conditions established in the earlier diplomacy. No anachronism in the entry stands out, and its likely contemporaneity is vitally corroborated by a report in the *C* version of the *Annales Cambriae*, of the 'Congregatio navium in urbe Legionum a rege Saxonum Eadgar' in 973, a statement which also appears in *Brut y Tywysogyon*.¹⁴²

The onus, then, is on anyone who would wish to argue that nothing happened at Chester in 973, but it is equally clear that a heavy burden would lie on a person who would argue, against the evidence of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, that a submission was involved. Since it was highlighted by Stevenson over a century ago, the initial props of this case are the lines in the Life of St. Swithun, written by Ælfric at some point in the

¹⁴⁰ASC D 972 [recte 973]. 'In this year the atheling Edgar was consecrated king at Bath on the day of Pentecost, on 11 May, in the thirteenth year after he succeeded to the kingdom, and he was but one year off thirty. And immediately after that the king took his whole naval force to Chester, and six kings came to meet him, and all gave him pledges that they would be his allies on sea and on land.'

¹⁴¹Like *midwyrhta*, *efenwyrhta* could, as well, be a calque for Latin *cooperator*, as suggested by John of Worcester's translation of *efenwyrhtan* as *cooperatores*, for which see above, 134. I owe this suggestion to T. M. Charles-Edwards.

¹⁴²AC C 973; ByT 973.

990s,¹⁴³ which note how kings of the 'cumera and scotta. . . gebugon to eadgares wissunge'.¹⁴⁴ These lines must, however, be viewed in their full context, coming, as they do, in the concluding section of this Life:

We habbað ne gesæd be swiðune þus sceortlice .
 and we secgað to soðan þæt se tima wæs gesælig
 and wynsum on angel-cynne . þaða eadgar cynincg
 þone cristen-dom ge-fyrðrode . and fela munuclifa arærde .
 and his cynerice wæs wunigende on sibbe .
 swa þæt man ne gehyrde gif ænig scyp-here wære
 buton agenre leode þe ðis land heoldon .
 and ealle ða cyningas þe on þysum iglande wæron .
 cumera . and scotta . comon to eadgare .
 hwilon anes dæges eahta cyningas .
 and hi ealle gebugon to eadgares wissunge .
 Þær-to-eacan wæron swilce wundra gefremode
 þurh þone halgan swyðun . swa swa we sædon ær .
 and swa lange swa we leofodon þær wurdon gelome wundra .
 On ðam timan wæron eac wurð-fulle bisceopas .
 dunstan se anræda æt ðam erce-stole .
 and æpelwold se arwurða . and oðre gehwylce .
 ac dunstan and æpelwold wæron drihtne gecorene .
 and hi swyðost manodon menn to godes willan .
 and ælc god arærdon gode to ewemednysse .
 þæt geswuteljað þa wundra þe god wyrcoð þurh hi .¹⁴⁵

While not the only example, this is one of the clearest expressions, in the generation after his death, of the idea that Edgar's reign was as a 'Golden Age'.¹⁴⁶ When one considers the extremely close links between Edgar and the ecclesiastical reformers of

¹⁴³Peter Clemoes, 'The Chronology of Aelfric's Works', in Clemoes, ed. *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1959), 212-47.

¹⁴⁴W. H. Stevenson, 'The Great Commendation to King Edgar in 973', *English Historical Review* 13 (1898) 505; Walter W. Skeat, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, vol. i. (London, 1881), 468.

¹⁴⁵Skeat, 468-70, translation, Skeat, 469-71, 'We have now spoken thus briefly of Swithun, and we say of a truth that the time was blessed and winsome in England, when King Eadgar furthered Christianity, and built many monasteries, and his kingdom still continued in peace, so that no fleet was heard of, save that of the people themselves who held this land; and all the kings of the Cymry and Scots that were in this island, came to Eadgar once upon a day, being eight kings, and they all bowed themselves to Eadgar's rule. Then moreover were such wonders wrought, through Saint Swithun, as we said before, and as long as we have lived frequent miracles were done there. At that time there were also worthy bishops, Dunstan, the resolute, in the archbishopric, and Æthelwold the venerable, and others like them; but Dunstan and Æthelwold were chosen of god, and they, most of all, exhorted men to [do] God's will, and advanced everything good to the pleasure of God, as the miracles testify which God worketh through them.'

¹⁴⁶See the extremely perceptive comments on his reign by Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, (London, 1989) 50-6 especially.

his day, it is not surprising, considering who was writing the source material, that he would be so remembered.¹⁴⁷ Ælfric's comments, would, as well, have evoked a stark contrast to the events of his own day, when Scandinavian fleets were increasingly active, and the king was not so friendly to ecclesiastics. Ælfric was portraying an ideal king from the point of view of a reforming monk, so although he was probably a witness to, or received a first-hand account of the events at Chester in 973, his testimony regarding what happened there cannot be trusted. His account is, however, important, as it corroborates the evidence, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, that there was a major diplomatic event in Edgar's reign, although it does introduce a problem, whether there were six or eight kings involved, and only offers vague clues as to their identity.¹⁴⁸

One must turn to the works of the Anglo-Norman chroniclers John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury to answer these questions. John commented that 'cui subreguli eius .viii., Kynath, scilicet rex Scottorum, Malcolm rex Cumborum, Maccus plurimarum rex insularum, et alii .v., Dufnal, Siferth, Huuual, Iacob, Iuchil', visited Edgar, and an abridged version of this list, which obviously derives from a common source, occurs in the Durham tract *Libellus de primo adventu Saxonum*.¹⁴⁹ Identifications for six of the eight kings mentioned have been generally accepted, 'Kynath' being the Mac Ailpín king who ruled from 971 to 995, 'Malcolm' the king of

¹⁴⁷For an assessment of the recent work on the tenth-century reform, and Edgar's role within it, see Catherine Cubitt, 'Review Article: The tenth-century Benedictine Reform in England', *Early Medieval Europe* 6 (1997) 77-94.

¹⁴⁸Hudson, *Kings*, 98 dismisses Ælfric's testimony as 'merely a panegyric rather than the record of a specific meeting.' Ælfric's comment, however, that they came 'hwilon anes dæges eahta cyningas', 'upon one day eight kings', certainly seems to suggest a specific meeting, although one need not necessarily associate it with the events of Chester in 973.

¹⁴⁹*JW 973; Libellus de primo adventu Saxonum*, [henceforth *DPSA* in notes and text] in Thomas Arnold, ed., *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, vol. ii., 365-84, at 372. 'cui .viii. reges, scilicet Kynodus rex Scottorum, et Malcolm rex Cumborum, et Maccus plurimarum rex Insularum, et alii .v.' One might argue that one or other source was directly dependent on the other, but this seems unlikely. The earliest manuscript which includes *DPSA*, for which there is not an autograph copy, is Liege University Library MS 369C. Bernard Anthony Meehan, 'A reconsideration of the historical works associated with Symeon of Durham; manuscripts, texts and influences', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1980, 135, notes that the episcopal lists within this manuscript suggest a date of 1124x28, although the date of composition for the text could be as early as 1101. This dating span falls in the same period as the composition of John of Worcester's *Chronicle*, and a common source, rather than a direct relationship is also suggested by the portrayal of the eight rulers as *subreguli* by John of Worcester, as opposed to *reges* in *DPSA*.

Strathclyde who died in 997, 'Maccus', a Scandinavian king active in the Irish sea in the period, 'Dufnal' the king of Strathclyde who died on pilgrimage in 975, 'Huuual' Hywel son of Ieuaf, who was killed in 985, and 'Iacob' Iago son of Idwal, who was a witness to S 566, and was killed in 979.¹⁵⁰ Excepting Morgan ab Owain and Einion ab Owain, this represents a list of all the 'great and good' in Britain in 973, and Stenton is almost certainly correct to comment that 'No Anglo-Norman writer, inventing a list of names with which to garnish an ancient annal, could have come as close as this to fact or probability.'¹⁵¹

This still leaves one the problem of the two persons, 'Siferth' and 'Iuchil', who do not apparently appear in the historical record. One's attention is drawn, however, to the slightly different list of names which is recorded by William of Malmesbury, who was drawing upon the same sources as John of Worcester.¹⁵²

Regem Scottorum Kinadium, Cumborum Malcolmun, archipiratam
Mascusium omnesque reges Walensium, quorum nomina fuere Dufnal Giferth
Huual Iacob Iudethil.¹⁵³

Significantly, while 'Siferth' and 'Iuchil' pose problems, plausible identifications of 'Giferth' and 'Iudethil' can be made. 'Giferth' could possibly be Gothfrith son of Harold, the brother of Maccus, who died in 989 as 'ri Innsi Gall'.¹⁵⁴ 'Iudethil' suggests the Welsh name 'Iudhail', and while no 'Iudhail' appears in annalistic sources in the period, a later genealogy does include an 'Ithel ap Idwallon', grandson of the Morgan who died in 974, who would have been contemporary.¹⁵⁵ These identifications suggest that

¹⁵⁰AU 971.1; ByT 971; AU 975.2; AC 979; AC 985; AU 995.1; AU 997.5.

¹⁵¹Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 370.

¹⁵²On the relationships between the two chronicles, see most importantly Martin Brett, 'John of Worcester and his Contemporaries', in R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, eds., *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1981), 101-26 and R. R. Darlington and Patrick McGurk, 'The Chronicon et Chronicus of "Florence" of Worcester and its use of sources for English History Before 1066', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 5 (1982) 185-96.

¹⁵³GRA §148.

¹⁵⁴AU 989.4. R. M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol ii., 133, perhaps influenced by William's comments that Giferth was one of the 'reges Walensium', disagrees, noting that this suggested identification 'hardly accords with his title of *subregulus* in Sawyer 808, or his twinning with "Iacob" in Sawyer 566, and someone called Gruffydd seems more likely.' The evidence of S 808 seems, however, to be irrelevant, since this charter is spurious, and, as discussed above, 121, the 'Syferth' in S 566 was likely a different person. Considering its absence in other versions of the list, 'reges Walensium' is likely William's interpretation.

¹⁵⁵Peter C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, (Cardiff, 1966), 122.

William preserved, in a better form than John, a list of names which was perhaps recorded contemporaneously in Welsh orthography, as suggested by John's garbling of 'Iudethil', and his mistaken rendering of the initial G in 'Giferth' as an S.¹⁵⁶

The fact that John and William preserved a list of names which is far too accurate to be a later invention might serve as another starting point for an argument in favour of the 'submission' interpretation. One might highlight, first, the discrepancy between this list, which records eight kings, and the account in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which merely mentions six, and on this basis discount the *Chronicle's* version of events, which does not suggest a 'submission'. This does not, however, seriously undermine the chronicler's credibility, as he may not have viewed all those persons who attended as kings. This possibility seems likely considering that, on my interpretation, of the eight persons named, two were from Strathclyde, two were competing for authority in Gwynedd, two were active in the Irish Sea area, and one was an obscure dynast from southern Wales; the chronicler need not have considered all of them to be regal. A second argument one might pursue in favour of the 'submission' interpretation would be to note that since John and William preserved an authentic list of participants in the meeting, then this lends credibility to the idea that the rowing story was contemporary, and not invented at a later date. This argument would, however, ignore the confected nature of John and William's accounts. Both drew upon many sources, but while William strived to blend these, John's cut-and-paste style quite often allows one to identify his sources. In the case of his entry for 973, it is clear that he is not the sole witness for anything which he writes.

¹⁵⁶For these comments, I am indebted to Thomas Clancy who noted the following in the wake of a paper presented to Edinburgh's Denys Hay Seminar in 1995. 'If both Malmesbury and Worcester scholars were working from a list originally in Welsh orthography, the mistake of G for S would be very explicable, and not uncommon, hence Siferth. . . . Iudethil . . . looks pretty clearly like an attempt at Iudhail. . . . Iudhail/Iudethil would explain the bizarre Juchil as well, since an insular d can easily be misread as a c, especially when followed by a letter with an upright.' Compare the comment of Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, 133 that 'William and John were probably dependent upon a list (or a copy of a list) in Welsh orthography, which would explain the difference between their readings. . . .'

Excepting his application of the sobriquet *pacificus* to Edgar, John's account of the year from 'Rex Anglorum' to 'Legionum Ciuitatem appulit' transparently relies upon a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which is related to *D* or *E*. At this point he introduced the list of eight kings, also recorded by William and in *DPSA*, to replace the terse reference to 'vi. cyningas' which appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Excepting the comment 'ut mandarant', which is probably his own introduction, the rest of the entry up to 'esse uellent, iurauerunt', relies, once again, on John's manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It is not until this point that he introduces the story of the rowing on the Dee, so it does not follow that he drew this from the same source as his list of eight kings. In short, the authenticity of the list lends no weight to the credibility of the story, which, were it found in an Icelandic Saga or an Irish source such as the *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib*, would almost certainly be unceremoniously dismissed as historical fiction. The fact that this historical fiction is recorded by 'good historians' such as John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury cannot change the likelihood that we are dealing, merely, with a story.¹⁵⁷

One serious point in favour of accepting some sort of rowing incident does, however, remain - while possibilities can be suggested, there is no clear surviving source for the story. Rivers and diplomacy were associated in an incident in 369, when Valens and Athanaric met on a ship in the middle of the Danube, although the location suggests an attempt at displaying theoretical equal status, rather than 'submission'.¹⁵⁸ Another incident, which was contemporary with the meeting at Chester although it took place on the opposite side of Europe, is probably of more interest. In 971, after inconclusive warfare, the Byzantine Emperor Tzimiskes met Sviatoslav of the Rus. 'Sviatoslav arrived in a small boat, rowing "as one of the others" of his crew; he conversed with the emperor while sitting on the main-thwart. . . his failure to stand or

¹⁵⁷To draw in a more modern example, the quality of information presented is comparable to that in the story of George Washington's supposed boyhood encounter with a cherry tree.

¹⁵⁸See Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988), 68; Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool, 1991), 25-6, 28.

show other marks of deference before the emperor befitted a meeting between two fully empowered rulers, if not equals.¹⁵⁹ A route by which this story could have influenced tradition on diplomacy in Britain can be suggested. In 972, Oswald's visit to Rome to collect his *pallium* coincided with the marriage, in the same city, of Otto II to the Byzantine Theophanu.¹⁶⁰ Oswald could, at that time, have heard news of the Byzantine diplomatic event, and relayed it on to his own kingdom, while another possibility is that the story was related, at a later date, through links between the Ottonian and Æthelwulfing courts.¹⁶¹ One might argue that the news directly resulted in the idea of a 'rowing' ceremony at the meeting in 973. What seems more likely, however, is that reports of the two diplomatic events were merged and elaborated by later tradition, perhaps at the time that the idea of the Edgarian 'Golden Age' was at its height.

Overall, then, cases for regarding the meeting of 973 as a 'submission' are doubtful, although one is still left with the problem of why it would be necessary for so many kings to attend a tenth-century political summit. The stock answer is that it was a coalition against the Scandinavian threat, Nelson's 'pan-Britannic alliance.' If so, it was, however a pan-Britannic alliance with, rather than against Scandinavians, as the only two Scandinavian kings active in Britain in this period were Maccus and Gothfrith, the sons of Harold, who were both present in Chester. An intriguing interpretation is prompted by the possibility that 'Dufnal' was not, as has been traditionally assumed, the king of Strathclyde who died on pilgrimage in 975.¹⁶² If the list of kings can be trusted, he had already, by 973, stepped down in favour of his son Máel Coluim. If one widened their horizons beyond Britain, an equally plausible candidate for 'Dufnal' would be Domnall

¹⁵⁹Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200* (London, 1996), 149-50.

¹⁶⁰Byrthferth of Ramsey, *Vita Oswaldi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, in James Raine, ed., *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops* (London, 1879), 435-6; Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: the king's wife in the early Middle Ages* (London, 1989), 132-3.

¹⁶¹On links between the Ottonian and Æthelwulfing courts, which may date to the marriage of Æthelstan's sister to Otto I c. 930, see Karl Leyser, 'The Ottonians and Wessex', in Leyser, *Communications and Power in Medieval Europe: The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries* (London, 1994), 73-104.

¹⁶²AU 975.2.

ua Néill, the king of Tara who died in 980.¹⁶³ This would raise the prospect that it was not only the most powerful kings in Britain who were present, but the most powerful kings in the Insular World, who may have entered into an alliance against the troublesome Olaf Cuarán, king of Dublin, who is conspicuously absent.¹⁶⁴

One is more inclined, however, to look for motivation closer to home, and it is clear that politics in Britain, especially in the north, were not running smoothly in the years preceding 973. In 971, the *Annals of Ulster* report that 'Culen [m.] Illuilb, ri Alban do marbad do Bretnaibh i rroi catha', and the 'Scottish Chronicle' adds that Cuilén's brother Eochaid was also killed.¹⁶⁵ Coincidentally or not, this occurred one year after a 'Malcolm dux', probably Máel Coluim of Strathclyde, appeared in the witness list to one of Edgar's charters, which represents the only instance during Edgar's entire reign of a foreign king appearing in a witness list.¹⁶⁶ While Cuilén's successor Cináed was probably thankful to the Strathclyde Britons for eliminating his cousins, and providing him an opportunity to take the throne, the evidence of the 'Scottish Chronicle' suggests that he took this threat to Mac Ailpín authority in northern Britain quite seriously, although the entry supplies far more riddles than answers:

Statim predauit Britanníam ex parte. Pedestres Cinadi occisi sunt maxíma cede in moin ua Cornari. Scotti predauerunt Saxoníam ad Stanmoir et ad Cluiam et ad sta(u)gna Deranni. Cínadius autem uallauit ripas uadorum Forthín. Post annum perrexít Cínadius et predauit Saxoníam et traduxit filium regis Saxorum.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ AU 980.2, where he is described as 'ardri Erenn.'

¹⁶⁴ I owe this suggested identification of 'Dufnal', and the point about Olaf Cuarán, to Alex Woolf.

¹⁶⁵ AU 971.1. 'Cuilén [son of] Illulb, king of Scotland [Alba], was killed by the Welsh [Britons] in a battle-rout'; Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", 151, 'Culen et frater eius occisi sunt a Britonibus.'

¹⁶⁶ S 779. The identification was suggested by Nicholas Banton, 'Monastic Reform and the Unification of Tenth-Century England', *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982) 79ff. This charter has been regarded with suspicion in the past, but the arguments of John, *Orbis Britanniae*, 210-33, have swayed opinion in favour of authenticity.

¹⁶⁷ Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", 151, translation 161. 'Immediately he plundered part of Britain. Kenneth's foot soldiers were slain, with very great slaughter, on the moss by the Cornie. The Scots plundered England [Northumbria?] as far as Stainmore, as far as the Clough, and as far as the pools of the Derwent. Moreover, Kenneth fortified the banks of the fords of the Forth. After a year, Kenneth proceeded to plunder England [Northumbria?], and carried off the son of the king of the Saxons.'

Overall it seems that, after an initial setback, Cináed led two successful raids against his neighbours. Which neighbours these were depends heavily, however, on how one interprets the various place-names which the 'Scottish Chronicle' provides.

Hudson provides a plausible suggestion, Abercorn, for Cináed's disaster at 'moin ua Cornari', and if this identification is correct, it seems to have been the worst possible start, a loss on home soil.¹⁶⁸ The identification of the place-names relating to Cináed's second, successful, action are particularly crucial, and establish, at least, that his first raid had not been a long-term setback. Hudson has offered plausible suggestions for these locations, although only the identification of Stainmore seems certain. If he is correct in his identifications of *Cluiam* as the small river Clough southwest of Sedburgh, and *sta(u)gna Deranni* as Bassenthwaite Lake and Derwentwater, it is clear that the raid was directed against the western coast of Britain.¹⁶⁹ But directed against who? Hudson comments:

Neither the Scots nor the men of Strathclyde controlled Cumberland or Westmorland at that time, for the Chronicle specifically identifies those regions as English.¹⁷⁰

While it is possible that Cináed's raid was directed against the 'English', Hudson's statement is not precisely correct, as the 'Scottish Chronicle' notes that Cináed raided to those locations within *Saxoníam*, which indicates geography, rather than ethnicity. As such, it need not represent political boundaries which were current in 971. The boundaries of Strathclyde in this period are an enigma,¹⁷¹ and it is possible, in the light of the death of Cináed's predecessor, that a raid extending to the southern borders of Strathclyde was being specified. The record of Cináed's third raid leaves us with even more severe riddles, as it is difficult to accept at face value the statement that, at the

¹⁶⁸Hudson, *Kings*, 94.

¹⁶⁹Hudson, *Kings*, 95; Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 140. Hudson makes the interesting suggestion that, on both occasions, Cináed was following Roman roads.

¹⁷⁰Hudson, "The Scottish Chronicle", 140.

¹⁷¹See D. P. Kirby, 'Strathclyde and Cumbria', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquary and Archaeological Society* 62 (1962) 77-94; P. A. Wilson, 'On the Use of the Terms "Strathclyde" and "Cumbria"', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquary and Archaeological Society* 66 (1966) 57-92.

culmination of the raid, he 'traduxit filium regis Saxorum.' If this was a son of Edgar, one would expect such an event to be reported even in the bare notes on Edgar's reign which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* leaves us. One possibility is that the 'regis Saxorum' was Eadulf ealdorman of Bamburgh, who, despite being regarded as an ealdorman by Edgar, could have been given a regal description by an annalist from northern Britain. If a son of Eadulf had been taken hostage, it would have represented a clear expression of his subordination to Cináed.

However one interprets the detail of these raids, it is clear that such activity on Edgar's northern borders would have prompted a military or diplomatic response. The sources suggest that Edgar was unwilling or unable to respond militarily, so it seems plausible that the primary motivation for the meeting in 973 was a diplomatic solution to the problems in the north. It is in this light that one must consider the opening passage, under the heading 'De Northymbrorum Comitabus', in *DPSA*:

Primus comitum post Eiricum, quem ultimum regem habuerunt Northymbrenses, Osulf provincias omnes Northanhymbrorum sub Edrido rege procuravit. Deinde sub Eadgaro rege Oslac præficitur comes Eboraco, et locis ei pertinentibus; et Eadulf, cognomento Yvelcild, a Teisa usque Myreford præponitur Northymbris.¹⁷²

While this is a clearly retrospective view of history, this seems a reliable and independent record of events in Northumbria in the 950s and 960s.¹⁷³ The southern boundary of the northern unit of Northumbria is of special interest, as it is given as the Tees, which represented the limit of Máel Coluim's raid in 949.¹⁷⁴ The northern border, the 'Myreforth', is of less interest, as it likely represents the retrospective view of

¹⁷²*DPSA* 382. 'First of the lords after Eric, the last king whom the Northumbrians had, Osulf administered under King Eadred all the provinces of the Northumbrians. Thereafter under king Edgar Oslac was appointed lord over York and the districts pertaining to it, and Eadulf, called "Evil-Child", was placed over the Northumbrians from the Tees to the Myreforth.'

¹⁷³Osulf has been previously discussed. Oslac is mentioned in *ASC* DEF 966, and an 'Oslac dux' subscribed to many of Edgar's charters from 965 onwards. An 'Eadulf dux' appears as a witness to *S* 766, *S* 771, and *S* 779, all from the period 968-70, and in the last case appears alongside 'Malcolm dux.'

¹⁷⁴See above, 131.

the twelfth-century writer of *DPSA*.¹⁷⁵ Of even more interest, however, is the record of diplomacy between Edgar and Cináed with which it continues:

Isti duo comites [Oslac and Eadulf] cum Elfsio, qui apud Sanctum Cuthbertum episcopus fuerat, perduxerunt Kynet regem Scottorum ad regem Eadgarum. Qui, cum illi fecisset hominium, dedit ei rex Eadgarus Lodoneium, et multo cum honore remisit ad propria.¹⁷⁶

Although the phrase 'cum illi fecisset hominium' is an obvious anachronism in the account, it does not otherwise invite distrust. The escort by, excepting the archbishop of York, all the most important persons in Northumbria would be expected of a king, and, considering Cináed's military activities in previous years, was probably a necessity.¹⁷⁷ The 'grant' of Lothian to Cináed also provides a clear motivation for his visit, although considering the previous loss of Edinburgh to the Mac Ailpín's this may have been, as Geoffrey Barrow suggested, a recognition of *fait accompli*.¹⁷⁸ Since Dunbar was also an important fortress, it is possible, however, that parts of 'Lothian' were not yet in Cináed's hands.¹⁷⁹

One need not, of course, necessarily associate this meeting with that in Chester in 973, but this is the most economical explanation, considering that Cináed did not come to the throne until 971, and Edgar died in 975.¹⁸⁰ If this is accepted, then conflict resolution and peace-making, although one is given no clues as to the exact mechanism,

¹⁷⁵As suggested by Marjorie O. Anderson, 'Lothian and the Early Scottish Kings', *Scottish Historical Review* 39 (1960) 105-6. The identification of the 'Myreforth' is not certain, but is probably not the Firth of Forth.

¹⁷⁶*DPSA* 382. 'These two lords with Elfsio, who was bishop of St. Cuthbert, conducted Kenneth king of Scots to king Edgar. And when he [Kenneth] had done him homage, King Edgar gave him [Kenneth] Lothian, and sent him back to his own with much honour.' Roger of Wendover includes a much embroidered version of Cináed's visit in his *Flores Historiarum*, for which see *EHD* 258.

¹⁷⁷Hudson, *Kings*, 99 suggests that the problematic phrase 'traduxit filium regis Saxorum' may refer to 'the giving of hostages as part of a safe conduct' in connection with this visit.

¹⁷⁸Barrow, 'The Anglo-Scottish border', 153.

¹⁷⁹Other opinion would associate the 'cession of Lothian' with the battle of Carham. See the debate in Bernard Meehan, 'The siege of Durham, the battle of Carham, and the cession of Lothian', *Scottish Historical Review* 55 (1976) 1-19; A. A. M. Duncan, 'The battle of Carham, 1018', *Scottish Historical Review* 55 (1976) 20-28. The memory that Lothian was a new addition to the 'Scottish' *regnum* continued into the late twelfth century, when Adam of Dryburgh could write that he was 'in terra Anglorum et in regno Scotorum.' See Robert Bartlett, 'Cults of Irish, Scottish and Welsh saints in twelfth-century England', in Brendan Smith, ed., *Britain and Ireland 900-1300: Insular Responses to Medieval European Change* (Cambridge, 1999), 81.

¹⁸⁰The case of Michael Dolley, 'Roger of Wendover's date for Eadgar's Coinage Reform', *British Numismatic Journal* 49 (1979) 1-11, for dating the coinage reform to 973 also depends upon this assumption.

are suggested by the historical context of the meeting, not 'submission'. Edgar, for his part, was likely responding to Cináed's activities in 971 and 972 with both a recognition of Cináed's authority in Lothian, and a (re)affirmation of the Mac Ailpín sphere of influence in the north. Cináed likely responded with a promise not to cause more trouble, and under such circumstances it is not surprising that Máel Coluim of Strathclyde also found it prudent or necessary to attend. His appearance just after Cináed in the list of kings suggests that his presence was vitally important in whatever agreements were reached, and they are the two most likely candidates, amongst those who attended, for peace-making activity. Unfortunately, any exploration of whether this was successful is made impossible by the black hole in the evidence which once again descends upon northern Britain for the three decades after 973.

Although the attendance of 'Iudethil' will probably remain a mystery, plausible, but probably unconnected suggestions can also be made for the presence of Maccus, Gothfrith, Hywel, and Iago. The *Annales Cambriæ* note that in 971 'Mon vastata est a filio Haraldi', an event which is also record in *Brut y Tywysogyon*.¹⁸¹ The presence of Edgar's fleet at Chester could be taken as a show of force, or 'gunboat diplomacy',¹⁸² intended to warn Maccus and Gothfrith away from any further activity against the western coast of Britain, as suggested by Edgar's circumnavigation of Wales. If so, they took the hint and went elsewhere, as the *Annals of Inisfallen* record that in 974, 'Macc Arailt co mmórthinól mór timchell Herend coro ort Inis Cathaig 7 co ruc Ímar lais i mbrait esse'.¹⁸³ Meanwhile, a succession dispute between Hywel and Iago was raging in Gwynedd. This had been prompted by Iago's imprisonment, in 969, of his brother Ieuaf ab Idwal, which, according to *Brut y Tywysogyon*, culminated in Ieuaf ab Idwal's death.¹⁸⁴ If the presence of Iago and his nephew Hywel, Ieuaf's son at Chester in 973 was intended to resolve the issue, it was a failure, as we read in 974 that 'Iago

¹⁸¹AC 971; ByT 971.

¹⁸²Many thanks to Michael Jones of Bates College for this suggestion.

¹⁸³AI 974.2. 'The son of Aralt [Harold] made a circuit of Ireland with a great company, and plundered Inis Cathaig, and brought Imar from it into captivity.'

¹⁸⁴AC 969; ByT 969.

expulsus est a regno suo, Hoeli regnante post eam.¹⁸⁵ The conflict was ultimately resolved with Hywel's second expulsion of Iago in 979, and the death of Iago's son Custennin at Hywel's hand in 980.¹⁸⁶ One possibility is that, rather than attending the meeting in order to resolve their conflict, Iago and Hywel were petitioning for intervention. Although outside help is not mentioned in 974, Hywel was twice allied with *Saesson* in the next decade.¹⁸⁷

However plausible or implausible these suggestions may appear, what is striking is the absence of a possible historical context for viewing the meeting in 973 as a 'submission'. While it is impressive enough that Edgar was a diplomat skilled enough to gather so many of his fellow kings together, the days when an Æthelwulfing king could dictate terms were over. The unopposed activities of Cináed in the north, and the absence, as Wendy Davies noted of 'the (in Welsh terms more powerful) *southern* kings of Wales'¹⁸⁸ at Chester suggests that there was an actual, and perhaps also deliberate contraction in Edgar's political horizons. A further, telling, point is the absence, with the possible exception of Máel Coluim of Strathclyde's visit in 970, of any subordinate kings at the Æthelwulfing court from 956 through to the end of the century.¹⁸⁹ Edgar might continue to employ 'imperial' terminology in his charters, as did his successors, but these titles were merely the culmination of a convention which had been developed when the idea of an Æthelwulfing 'Empire of Britain' was a real possibility. This possibility was still open to Æthelstan's mid-tenth-century successors, but each of them had done a poor job of achieving it.

Wendy Davies described the meeting in 973 as 'not so much the end of an era but a new kind of statement; foreign policy rather than internal politics.'¹⁹⁰ For the Æthelwulfing kings it was, however, the end of an era, and Edgar's abandonment of the

¹⁸⁵AC 974.

¹⁸⁶AC 979; ByT 979; ByT 980.

¹⁸⁷ByT 978; ByT 983; AC 983.

¹⁸⁸Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1983), 75.

¹⁸⁹S 783 and S 808 contain witness lists with foreign kings but both are spurious.

¹⁹⁰Davies, *Patterns of Power*, 75.

title 'Rex totius Britanniae' on his coinage in favour of 'Rex Anglorum' underlines the point. Rather than making a poor attempt at being an 'Emperor of Britain', Edgar had decided to make a better attempt of being a 'King of the English', a job which had not been ignored, but had certainly been sidelined by his predecessors. Other aspects of his reign, such the monastic reform movement and law reforms, suggest a similar move towards more vigorous rule of a smaller geographic area.¹⁹¹ The idea that Edgar was 'the most imperial of the late Anglo-Saxon rulers'¹⁹² does not seem sustainable; this is a status better accorded to Eadred, if one judges by rhetoric, or even better still to Æthelstan, if one judges by achievement. The respective foreign reputations of Æthelstan and Edgar, as recorded in their obituaries in Irish annals, illustrate this well. Æthelstan was described as 'cleithi n-ordain iartair domain', while in contrast the *Annals of Ulster* recorded that 'Etgair m. Etmonn, ri Saxan, in Christo pausauit', and the *Annals of Tigernach* concurred with a record of the death of Edgar 'religiossus rex.'¹⁹³ In this light it is not surprising, considering who wrote the sources in the middle ages, that Edgar's reign would be remembered as a 'Golden Age.' Perhaps it was for the clerics, but it was not for Æthelwulfing *imperium*, which was set aside in a period in which we should perhaps see the birth of England.

¹⁹¹Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 369-71; Banton, 'Monastic Reform', 84-5.

¹⁹²James Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', in Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, 217.

¹⁹³AU 939.6. 'Pillar of the dignity of the western world'; AU 975.1; Whitley Stokes, ed., 'The Annals of Tigernach: The Fourth Fragment, A.D. 973-A.D. 1088', *Revue Celtique* 18 (1897) 338.

Chapter V:

Conclusion

Herodotus of Halicarnassus, his *Researches* are here set down to preserve the memory of the past by putting on record the astonishing achievements both of our own and of other peoples; and more particularly, to show how they came into conflict.¹

In the two and a half millennia since Herodotus invented the subject of history, the primary approach which historians have used to make sense of the past has been the narrative. One thus finds long accounts of 'Anglo-Scottish' relations in articles and survey textbooks from the past century, which, perhaps unwittingly following the lead of Herodotus, were largely narratives of conflict.² One could begin in 600, with the 'bellum Saxonum in quo uictus est Aedan', move on to the end of the seventh-century 'Anglian hegemony' with Ecgfrith's defeat at *Nechtanessmere*, and finally fast-forward on to Cináed mac Ailpín's six invasions of 'Saxoniam' in the middle of the ninth century.³ Ironically for the current study, A. O. Anderson decided to omit this earlier part of the narrative for the published version of his paper, and began his narrative with the 'submission' to Edward the Elder in 920. Here, perhaps, the narrative is on firmer ground, as the political communities of the later middle ages were becoming vaguely recognisable during Constantín's and Edward's reigns. As noted, however, an approach to this incident which merely focuses on the 'Anglo-Scottish' portion of the equation ignores the complexities of a situation which involved many other players; including one, Ragnald, who was likely as important as Constantín and Edward.⁴ Even in later years of the tenth century, when Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns had established

¹Aubrey de Séincourt, tr., and A. R. Burns, *Herodotus: the Histories*, (London, 1972), 41.

²A. O. Anderson, 'Anglo-Scottish Relations from Constantine II to William', *Scottish Historical Review* 42 (1963) 1-20; William Ferguson, *Scotland's Relations with England: A Survey to 1707*, (Edinburgh, 1977).

³*AU* 600.1; *AU* 686.1; Hudson, "'The Scottish Chronicle'", *Scottish Historical Review* 77 (1998) 148.

⁴See above 67-8.

themselves as the two main players in Britain, the incidents involving them were influenced by the concerns of others. Ultimately, while the narrative of tenth-century 'Anglo-Scottish' relations might be very important to central medieval historians attempting to understand issues such as those which arose in the reigns of William Rufus or Edward I, it does not offer the early medieval historian much help in coming to grips with the issues of the day.

Western Britain presents a slightly different problem; should one attempt to create a narrative when large pieces of it are blank? Like others, the current writer is tempted to see, in the three generations beginning with Alfred, a period of 'Anglo-Welsh' relations characterised by various Welsh kings submitting to Æthelwulfing overlords.⁵ We are faced, however, with a large gap in the evidence falling in the later years of Alfred's reign, and the first part of Edward's reign, and only patchy evidence from charters for the attendance of Welsh kings at the Æthelwulfing court from the latter years of Æthelstan's reign onwards. The later issue is not too serious a problem when one realizes that there is a specific class of charter, the 'Alliterative Charter, which, in the reigns of Edmund and Eadred, contains all but one of the subscriptions of foreign, subordinate kings.⁶ From this we can probably conclude that the convention in other charters of the period was to omit the names of 'foreigners', so we have a clear example of a situation where absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. In the case of the evidence gap in Edward's reign one could, however, make an argument to silence either in the direction of a continuation of Alfred's policy, or a break in the narrative of subordination which was not renewed until later years; perhaps with the 'submission' to Edward in 918, but certainly with the reign of Æthelstan. The desire is certainly to fill in the blanks, but it is not clear whether this approach benefits, or hinders understanding of the period.

⁵See above, 56.

⁶See above, 122-3.

It has not, however, been the 'Anglo-Scottish' and 'Anglo-Welsh' narratives which have received the most attention in the ninth and tenth centuries. In no small part thanks to Bede, 'national' narratives, most importantly that of the development of 'England' have been the major concern of historians. Granted, it seems to make sense to begin this 'national' narrative at some point in the period covered in this study. To push this narrative back further, however, requires the issue of 'English National Identity' to be applied, a subject on which much scholarly ink has been spilled in recent years. A narrative on identity would serve, however, as a poor proxy for 'national' narrative even if there was clearer evidence for the adoption of 'English' identity before Alfred began to use it as a tool to unite his political community.⁷ Even with Alfred and his successors, however, one is left with no clear beginning for a 'national' narrative. The reign of Æthelstan has been a favourite choice, even before David Dumville dubbed him 'First King of England'.⁸ After all he was, in retrospect, the first king to rule over all of 'England', and to at least one contemporary he was seen to have 'completed England'.⁹ Being a 'King of the English' [as opposed to a 'King of England'] was certainly one hat which Æthelstan wore, but to focus on this aspect belittles his wider achievement; an extension of *imperium* over the island of Britain. Edgar, however, carefully retreated away from wider claims to authority, and we might see in his reign a better beginning for the 'national' narrative.¹⁰ To be hypercritical, one might postpone things until the eleventh century, when a state had developed whose institutions were able to survive multiple conquests.

There are other narratives to consider. Viewed in the broader context of Insular, and European history from the eighth century to the twelfth, developments in ninth- and tenth-century Britain can be seen as symptoms of processes which culminated in a marked reduction in the number of persons who could claim regal status. As a result of

⁷The best approach towards extending the 'national' narrative backwards remains, once again thanks to Bede, church history.

⁸David Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), 141.

⁹Dumville, *Wessex*, 170.

¹⁰See above, 152-3.

the actions of Charlemagne and his predecessors, this was a process which, on the continent, had run its course for the most part by the opening of the ninth century. In contrast, this had barely begun in the Insular world, although the 'Anglian hegemony', and the Southumbrian *imperia* forged by Æthelbald and Offa could be taken as harbingers of Æthelwulfing achievements.¹¹ It seems, however, that the Scandinavian attacks on Britain, which grew increasingly severe over the course of the ninth century, were the prime cause of the dynastic consolidation which occurred in the tenth. The first significant event in this narrative should, perhaps, be seen in the victory of the *gennti* over the Picts in 839,¹² which marked the first occasion when an Insular king of the top order was killed by a Scandinavian army. More dynasties were to fall after the better-known arrival of the 'great heathen army' in Britain in 866.¹³ Resident dynasties other than the Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns did, of course, survive, but in a diminished state of power. Æthelred of Mercia maintained a quasi-regal status, but, as a result of Edward the Elder's ambitions, was not able to pass a legacy on to the next generation. The dynasty in Bamburgh entered the tenth century as kings, but, under pressure from both north and south, had seen their status slip to that of mere ealdorman by the opening of Edgar's reign. Furthermore, Edgar's reign sees the last occasion when there were multiple kings in 'England.'

An adequate application of this narrative of regal restriction to western Britain would fall completely outside the scope of the current study. It may suffice here to note that there was a long process by which the status of the various subordinate, but independent Welsh kings of the tenth century was diminished. A brief foray into the later history of northern Britain can, hopefully, be excused. It took the Mac Ailpíns far longer than the Æthelwulfings to capitalize on the *imperium* they established in the tenth century. Although kings of Strathclyde silently disappeared after the second decade of the eleventh century, other dynasties survived into the twelfth century. The

¹¹See D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), 77-100; 129-36; 163-79.

¹²AU 839.9.

¹³ASC 866.

Mac Ailpíns themselves faded into history in the 1030s as a result of internecine strife and failure in the male line, although the last king from the dynasty, Máel Coluim mac Cináed (d. 1034), did contrive to pass the throne on to his grandson Donnchad. Donnchad and his descendants, were, however, to face a century of intermittent conflict, most famously that involving Mac Bethad mac Findláech, with a rival dynasty based in Moray. This issue was not resolved until 1130, when this dynasty suffered a severe, and apparently decisive, defeat, yet despite this, quasi-regal figures such as the Lords of the Isles survived into the later Middle Ages.¹⁴

Furthermore, it was not clear that a major dynasty in northern Britain would survive at all. The arrival of the Normans resulted in warfare of an unprecedented frequency between the main dynasties in Britain, conflicts which resulted, most famously, in the submission of Máel Coluim mac Donnchadha to William the Conqueror at Abernethy in 1072.¹⁵ In the last decade of the century, William Rufus capitalized on dynastic conflict amongst Máel Coluim's successors to the point that their status had been essentially reduced to that of client kings. David I did reverse this development within a generation, but it was by no means a forgone conclusion. The fact that two main players remained standing was no more a natural conclusion than if a 'Middle Kingdom' based at York had survived, or indeed if the political community established by the Mac Ailpíns had been eliminated, leaving a single king in Britain. The conflicts of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries do, however, provide a context for the comments of twelfth-century historians such as John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury, and Henry of Huntingdon, which brings one back full circle to the motivation for creating a narrative of 'Anglo-Scottish' relations in the first place.

¹⁴AU 1130.4; R. A. McDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard, c.1100–c.1336*, (East Linton, 1997).

¹⁵See A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom*, (Edinburgh, 1975), 117–22. For a broader discussion of the historical problems, see W. M. Aird, 'Northern England or Southern Scotland? The Anglo-Scottish Border in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries and the Problem of Perspective', in John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton, eds., *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England 1000–1700*, (Phoenix Mill, 1997), 27–39.

None of the narratives discussed here lacks validity; each represents different approaches which various historians have taken in their attempts to understand the past. The main commonality between each of the narratives is, however, that they were composed with the benefit of hindsight, and often in light of current-day events.¹⁶ However, the attempt, at least, must be made to understand the issues raised in terms which the players themselves would have understood. The idea of rulers holding an *imperium* over some, or all of the island of Britain was no new concept in the tenth century, as can be seen in the term, 'Brytenwealda', 'ruler of Britain', applied to various seventh and eighth century kings.¹⁷ Although it is nowhere stated explicitly, as it was with the comment on Ecgbert in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that '7 he wæs se eahtepa cýning se þe bretwalda wæs',¹⁸ it seems likely that these earlier ideas lie behind Æthelwulfing portrayals of themselves as 'Kings of all Britain' beginning with Æthelstan's reign. As Máire Herbert has argued, the Mac Ailpín title, 'rí Alban', 'king of Britain', likely had its immediate roots in providing a corollary to the term 'rí Éirenn', 'king of Ireland', found in Irish annals of the period.¹⁹ This does not preclude the idea, however, that the Mac Ailpíns were making a claim, as were the Æthelwulfings, to rule over the entire island.

This double claim to *imperium* comes into sharpest relief during the reign of Eadred. His preferred title from 951 until his death in 955 was 'rex et primicerius totius Albionis', thus directly mirroring the Mac Ailpín title 'rí Alban'.²⁰ One might read this as a new, explicit claim to authority over the Mac Ailpín's, but any immediate impetus for such a shift is lacking in the evidence. Once again, however, a look back to the

¹⁶One might attempt to deconstruct the author's own arguments by commenting on the youth of his nation's 'national identity', his presence in Europe in a period when it has been moving towards political unity, and his residence in Britain when its own political unity is looking fragile.

¹⁷T. M. Charles-Edwards, "'The Continuation of Bede", s.a. 750: high-kings, kings of Tara and "Bretwaldas"', 137-45, at 141-2ff, has hopefully written the last two footnotes on the often contentious meaning for this term.

¹⁸ASC A 827. 'And he was the eighth king who was "Bretwalda".'

¹⁹Máire Herbert, 'Rí Éireann, Rí Alban, kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries', in Simon Taylor, ed., *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297* (Dublin, 2000), 62-72, 69-72 especially.

²⁰S 555; S 560-1; S 563-4; S 568; S 570.

eighth century can provide some assistance. As T. M. Charles-Edwards has shown, the British *imperium* could be divided, as can be seen in the reigns of Æthelbald and Óengus, king of the Picts.²¹ This eighth-century division was essentially into Northumbrian, and Southumbrian areas, so it is not directly analogous to the tenth-century situation, which would have had a division further to the north, but it shows that there was a precedent for a shared *imperium*. If the narrative of accommodation between Æthelwulfings and Mac Ailpíns can be accepted,²² then one need not view the double claims to a British *imperium* as mutually exclusive.

It is the contention of the current study, however, that the most useful narrative is that of the rise of two new dynasties in the ninth century; dynasties which led the two dominant *imperia* in tenth-century Britain. Not only does this framework allow the modern historian to look back at the period with clarity, but it would have been recognizable to astute contemporary observers or the members of the dynasties themselves. The in all likelihood retrospective proclamation of Egbert, the progenitor of the Æthelwulfings, as the eighth 'Bretwalda' displays both a knowledge of the recent origins of the dynasty, and longer-term historical awareness. This proclamation might, however, be taken as an attempt to add lustre to a new dynasty still keenly aware of its aristocratic origins, rather than as a confident statement of its newly-won authority. By the middle of the tenth-century, however, it was not a view of the past but a description of the present which led Æthelwulfings to recast themselves as leaders of a multi-ethnic *imperium* which could even include pagans. A break with the past is much clearer in the case of the Mac Ailpíns, who were, at first, simply portrayed as inheritors of the ancient Pictish kingdom. Perhaps by, but probably during the early years of Constantín's reign they emerged from a makeover as kings of 'Alba', an inclusive geographic term which allowed a coherent framework for the Mac Alpíns' own extension of *imperium* over various peoples. In the first instance 'Alba' also advertised

²¹Charles-Edwards, "'The Continuation of Bede'", 138.

²²See above, 116.

a lofty claim to Britain, but in the long term came to refer to the much smaller area over which Constantín's political successors were able to impose their *regnum*. This process was mirrored with the Æthelwulfings, who entered the eleventh century as rulers of a single, albeit greatly expanded *regnum* rather than the *imperium* of the middle of the tenth-century.

While the ninth- and tenth-century dynastic narratives offer a logical model of historical interpretation, one is not, however, left with a clear view of the various methods, circumstances, and consequences of submissions in the same period. They sometimes drove, were sometimes driven by, and were sometimes irrelevant to wider events, and the best approach towards understanding them may lie in their initial removal from the broader narrative. The specific political context must serve as the starting-point for any connection to broader issues, and by adopting this approach one can begin to make sense of each incident, although the search for any coherent, all-encompassing interpretation is disappointing. As described by Asser, Alfred the Great, unlike others both before and after, adopted an accommodating attitude towards his neighbours, most importantly those to his west. With the survival of his own kingdom at stake, he was willing to use his largesse to win nominal authority over Welsh kings. This arrangement suited them as well, as they faced their own political problems, which could in part be solved by voluntary submission to Alfred, the most powerful Southumbrian king. Likewise, the accommodation reached between Alfred and Æthelred suited both parties. Æthelred was forced to make the nominal sacrifice of his regality, but was richly rewarded, not only with the grant of London in 886, but with the hand of his overking's daughter, Æthelflæd.²³ Æthelred's submission also completed Alfred's policy of reaching friendly understandings with his immediate neighbours, which allowed him to deal with more pressing threats.

Edward the Elder, perhaps for no other reason than he possessed means beyond those of Alfred, appears, however, as a rather more ruthless character than his

²³ASC 886.

father. He also needed practical assurances, beyond a mere vague recognition of lordship, to cement his piecemeal conquest of Southumbrian Britain. The numerous submissions described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries for his reign represent terms imposed on new subjects; very dissimilar to the voluntary agreements made by Alfred with loose subordinates. Edward also took advantage of circumstances within Mercia to completely overturn the policy of friendly subordination which had been in place for a generation. The diplomatic incidents involving Edward and foreign kings will likely remain, however, open to individual interpretation. Was the incident involving Welsh kings in 918 a renewal of a previous subordinate relationship, made necessary by the death of Æthelflæd? Did it represent the imposition of a new subordinate relationship which had lapsed with the death of Alfred? Was it merely a political summit rather than a submission? There is a good case to be made for each view, and one is left, as well, with an ambiguous answer on the significance of the meeting with the northern kings in 920, although geopolitical reality tips the balance against a 'submission' interpretation.

Despite sources which are in many respects inferior to those available for his fellow Æthelwulfings, with the reign of Æthelstan we are gifted with a period where a clear picture emerges. All available evidence, whether it be drawn from annals, charters, chronicles, literary sources, or numismatics portrays a ruler who was able to have his way with any potential opponent. Where the Welsh kings were concerned, the friendly overlordship of his grandfather had been replaced by more vigorous rule, which required attendance at court, military service, and in all likelihood, the payment of tribute. Good evidence also survives that Æthelstan was, unlike other Æthelwulfing kings, able to extend his *imperium* to the northern part of Britain by forcing the submission of Constantín in both 927 and 934. Yet *Brunanburh* underlines the point that submission could be fleeting, and perhaps indicates that Æthelstan had been pushing his luck when he invaded northern Britain in 934. The loss of the Five

Boroughs after his death also shows that even the stricter strategies of subordination which Edward had enforced could, ultimately, be reversed.

The historian, once again, faces historical fast rather than historical feast following Æthelstan's reign, as the rich evidence for submission relationships nearly dries up. It is clear, however, that Edmund and Eadred were able to maintain a measure of control over western Britain, as evidenced by the attendance of Welsh kings at the Æthelwulfing court. The same cannot be said for the *imperium* which Æthelstan had briefly extended over his neighbours to the north. Granted, there is chronicle evidence which records diplomatic meetings between Æthelwulfings and Mac Alpíns, which might be taken as evidence for submissions were it not for the ambiguous nature of the accounts and the lack of supporting evidence. The incidents in both 945 and 946 do not, however, appear to be 'submissions', but rather 'political summits' involving the leaders of the two predominant *imperia* in the island. With both these meetings, and that in 973, Wendy Davies' comment on 'foreign policy rather than internal politics' bears repeating.²⁴ It is from this thought which, perhaps, one can draw the most important lessons. The current study reinforces a perception which has grown in strength in the last generation of historiography; that both the significance of many incidences of submissions has been exaggerated, and that other incidents traditionally portrayed as 'submissions' have been misinterpreted. This admittedly narrow work, has, however, merely explored one hillock in a much larger mountain range. Ultimately, the healthy skepticism of the source material displayed here deserves to be applied to systematic studies of the Carolingian, Irish, and Ottonian evidence, and only then will the significance of the evidence from ninth- and tenth-century Britain be fully realized.

²⁴Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1983), 75.

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Appendix

Davidson, M. R., 'The (non) submission of the northern kings in 920', in Higham, N. J., and Hill, D., eds., *Edward the Elder*, 200-11.

EDWARD THE ELDER

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THE (NON)SUBMISSION OF THE NORTHERN KINGS IN 920¹

Michael R. Davidson

It is generally assumed that the authority which Æthelstan enjoyed over the northern half of Britain had a precedent in the 'submission' of the northern kings to Edward the Elder in 920. The evidence for this meeting is, however, quite thin, and ultimately boils down to the second part of the entry for the year 920 in the Parker Chronicle, since later chroniclers added no new information, just their own interpretations. As the incident has attracted much comment, but little detailed study since Frederick Wainwright's article of almost fifty years ago (Wainwright 1952), a reassessment would seem to be in order. Despite the chronology established over a half-century ago (Angus 1938), and reiterated in Dorothy Whitelock's translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Whitelock 1955: 194–9), confusion over the date of this event, occasionally given as 921, 923 or 924, has continued, even in the most recent translation of the *Chronicle* (Swanton 1996). Janet Bately's edition established, however, that these are misdatings which resulted from later addition of minims to an initially correct date of 920 (Bately 1986: lviii, 69), and her conclusion has been supported by David Dumville (Dumville 1992: 99–102). The text reads:

7 for þa þonan on Peaclond to Badecanwiellon 7 het gewyrcean ane
burg þær on neaweste 7 gemannian, 7 hine geceas þa to fæder 7 to
hlaforde Scotta cyning 7 eall Scotta þeod, 7 Rægnald 7 Eadulfes
suna 7 ealle þa þe on Norphymbrum bugeaþ, ægþer ge Englisce ge
Denisce ge Norþmen ge oþre, 7 eac Stræcledweala cyning 7 ealle
Stræcledwealas.

(ASC(A) 920)

In the words of Dorothy Whitelock's translation:

Then he [Edward] went from there into the Peak district to Bake-
well and ordered a borough to be built in the neighbourhood and
manned. And then the king of the Scots and all the people of the

THE (NON)SUBMISSION OF THE NORTHERN KINGS

Scots, and Ragnald, and the sons of Eadwulf and all who live in Northumbria, both English and Danish, Norsemen and others, and also the king of the Strathclyde Welsh and all the Strathclyde Welsh, chose him as father and lord.

(ASC(A) 920)

At first glance this seems rather clear cut, and one may wonder what controversy could arise out of a statement in a generally reliable, and at least near-contemporary, source, that some sort of submission took place in 920. Indeed, despite some dissenting voices, modern standard works of both English and Scottish history have generally interpreted this entry along that line. Although now dated, Sir Frank Stenton's assessment is typical. 'To Edward himself the submission meant that each ruler who became his man promised to respect his territory and to attack his enemies' (Stenton 1971: 334). Wainwright was the first scholar this century to provide a serious challenge to the consensus, and claimed that 'The "submission" was fundamentally no more than an anti-Norse coalition' (Wainwright 1952: 127). Alfred Smyth put forward some very good arguments against the 'submission' interpretation, but unfortunately in a book which received poor reviews (Smyth 1984: 199-200). The most telling criticism, however, has come from Pauline Stafford, who noted that 'The kings of Scots might well have described this alliance sealed on the Pennine borders of York and Mercia in other ways' (Stafford 1989: 33). She argued that the business of the meeting was essentially a settling of the political landscape in Britain. This paper will assess this conclusion, along with Wainwright's and the traditional vision of a general 'submission' to Edward.

Such a short entry must of course be interpreted in context, but what context? The conventional approach, adopted by historians from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries, is to regard the meeting as the opening round of medieval Anglo-Scottish relations. Although anachronistic, since it is too early to be talking about either 'England' or 'Scotland' in 920, this approach has suited generations of scholars. Twelfth-century chroniclers could find in this meeting, among others, a clear precedent and justification for the attempted subordination of kings of Scots along 'feudal' lines. It was this issue which exercised the minds of historians well into this century, and Stenton could note wryly that the obligations of the 920 meeting, 'no more than dimly foreshadow the elaborate feudal relationship which many medieval, and some later, historians have read into them' (Stenton 1971: 334). The main pitfall of the approach, however, is that the resulting debate has too often proceeded along parochial, national lines. To give a recent example, Benjamin Hudson represents the Scottish side of this argument. He attempts to explain away the meeting and other evidence which suggests that tenth-century kings of Alba (the more appropriate term to apply to those normally referred to as 'Kings of Scots') might have been subject to English

kings (Hudson 1994: 73). It is difficult to fault Wormald's comment that 'Hudson is playing an old nationalist tune on these matters. It is time that it was heard no more' (Wormald 1995: 171).

This said, one could argue that there was in fact no meeting of any sort, as our source does not explicitly state this. This, however, seems an excessively negative approach, as the *Chronicle* implies collective dealings with Edward, even if the conventional assumption, unstated by the *Chronicle*, that the meeting took place at Bakewell is not taken on board. Yet Bakewell, close to the border between Northumbria and Mercia, would be a reasonable location for the motley collection of kings mentioned in the *Chronicle* to meet, although the diverse personnel involved underscore the point that an interpretation along the lines of 'Anglo-Scottish relations' is not particularly fruitful.

Wainwright's alternative interpretation, that the meeting represented an anti-Norse alliance, is an argument which falls into the context of the generally accepted idea that kings in Britain united in common cause against Scandinavian invaders. In the arena of Anglo-Welsh relations, Henry Loyn described this 'standard orthodox doctrine' as 'a realisation that under pressure of common Viking attack the Christian communities on both sides of the linguistic frontier, English and Welsh, were drawn together into a sometimes precarious alliance' (Loyn 1980-1: 283). Pauline Stafford noted more generally, and with later qualification, that 'By c. AD 900 a century of Viking raiding had produced a sense of common purpose among the rulers surrounding the North Sea and English Channel' (Stafford 1989: 114). Yet when one begins to examine this argument in detail, it is unconvincing. Although there is, in some cases, good evidence for alliance against Scandinavians, there are also spectacular examples of alliances with Scandinavians, such as that of Æthelwold, and the extraordinary coalition defeated by Æthelstan at Brunanburh (ASC 900, 937). In total, from the reign of Alfred to the end of the tenth century, there are at least sixteen cases of military alliance in Britain mentioned in contemporary, near-contemporary, or later sources which do not arouse suspicion (Davidson 2001). These cases are almost equally balanced between those involving alliances with Scandinavians, those involving alliances against Scandinavians, and those not involving Scandinavians at all. Anti-Scandinavian alliances are, in fact, fewest. It does not seem, then, that the idea that anti-Scandinavian alliances were the order of the day can be accepted. One is led, instead, to conclusions similar to those reached by Janet Nelson with respect to the Continent, that rulers often fought against Scandinavians, but were equally willing to employ them, sometimes literally, for their own ends (Nelson 1992: 204-6).

Shorn of the general anti-Scandinavian thesis, Wainwright's arguments regarding the 920 meeting begin to fray. One is immediately faced with the problem that Røgnald, the powerful 'king of the fair foreigners and the dark foreigners' (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: entry 921.4) can hardly be

envisaged within an 'anti-Norse' coalition, but there are deeper flaws. The ultimate kernel for the argument comes from late eleventh- or twelfth-century Irish saga material regarding Æthelflæd, who seems to have very much captured the imagination of her neighbours across the Irish Sea. The so-called 'Fragmentary Annals of Ireland' relate that:

Æthelflæd, through her own cleverness, made peace with the men of Alba and with the Britons, so that whenever [sic] the same race [the heathens] should come to attack her, they would rise to help her. If it were against them that they came, she would take arms with them.

(Radner 1978: 181)

This is far from contemporary, but the main problem in accepting this statement is that Irish writers of the eleventh and twelfth century (most famously in the heavily spin-doctored 'War of the Gael with the Foreigner') (Ní Mhaonaigh 1995), were keen to portray selfless opposition to, or common alliance against, Scandinavian invaders. Given that contemporary Irish sources note many instances of alliance with Scandinavians – with the *Annals of Ulster* recording at least ten in the tenth century alone – one cannot accept statements in later Irish sources which portray alliances against Scandinavians that have no support from contemporary sources (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: entries 928.5, 933.3, 947.1, 953.1, 956.3, 968.3, 970.3, 970.4, 983.2, 995.2). In fact, a near-contemporary source contradicts the account in the Fragmentary Annals on two points, since the Mercian Register indicates that Æthelflæd both sent an army into Wales in 916, and, in 918, entered into some sort of alliance with the men of York, who were presumably in some sense Danes (Taylor 1983: 49–51; Whitelock 1955: entries for 916, 918). Given the shakiness of this foundation, the rest of Wainwright's argument (that Æthelflæd led the purported alliance – even though the Fragmentary Annals merely state that she instigated it – and that the purpose of the meeting in 920 was for Edward to assume formal leadership of this alliance) fails to convince.

Once this conclusion is discarded, one must inevitably return to the source itself, and examine it critically. In recent generations several historians have argued that the ninth- and early tenth-century portions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* essentially represent 'dynastic propaganda' intended to give greater authority to West Saxon rulers (Davis 1971; Sawyer 1971: 20; Wallace-Hadrill 1975: 209–11). However, very recently, both Sarah Foot (Foot 1996: 35–6) and Simon Keynes have taken issue with this perception. Keynes in particular has offered an elegant criticism of the view that the *Chronicle* is 'a fundamentally West Saxon work, celebrating the achievements of the West Saxon dynasty at the expense of their rivals' (Keynes 1998: 40). He does, however, acknowledge, as stressed in previous work (Keynes and Lapidge 1983: 278–80), the crucial distinction between the 'common stock' of the

Chronicle, and later continuations. 'Propaganda' is, almost certainly, a misleading word to apply, as one sees nothing in early medieval Britain akin to the systematic distortion of information for which there are sad contemporary examples. This said, one must acknowledge the parochial interest and West Saxon perspective of the *Chronicle*, and at the risk of replacing one anachronism with another, one might say that Alfred and Edward possessed skilled 'spin doctors'. Crucially for the issue at hand, this 'spin doctoring' is particularly evident in those entries, from 915 to 920, which are peculiar to the Parker *Chronicle*, and this section of the chronicle deserves to be treated, and criticised, as a text in itself. Invariably, the entries begin with the formula, 'In this year, at X time king Edward did Y', and go on to relate an extraordinary narrative of burh building and military success. The entries from 915 to 920 do not so much comprise part of an *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as a 'Chronicle of the Triumphs of Edward'. Granted, the chronicler had much to celebrate, but in doing so he maintained an ideology of silence regarding other important developments which must be reconstructed through a patchwork of Irish, Mercian, and Welsh annals, and Cuthbertine narrative sources. The customary practice, therefore, of treating the *Chronicle* as the fundamental narrative places many pitfalls in the path of the historian, and may ultimately produce distorted interpretations.

The question of the intended audience for this section of the *Chronicle* is also crucial, and it is possible that it was written with an eye to the Mercians. Although Simon Keynes has argued that the Mercian kingdom was subsumed under the rule of Alfred and Edward into a newly created 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons', I am not wholly convinced that they were successful in absorbing the Mercian polity. That said, our disagreements are essentially matters of emphasis (Keynes 1998; Keynes this volume). One sees the West Saxon, or more appropriately the 'Anglo-Saxon', view of the situation in the three charters from 903 which state that an ealdorman 'petitioned King Edward, and also Æthelred and Æthelflæd, who then held rulership and power over the people of the Mercians under the aforesaid king' (S 367, S 367a, S 371). This must be compared against a Mercian view, seen in a charter of 901, which stops just short of claiming royal status, but claims that Æthelred and Æthelflæd held their rulership by the grace of God (S 221). Furthermore, that Edward was able to 'send an army both from the West Saxons and the Mercians' in 909 and 910 (Whitelock 1955: ASC(A) 909, 910), must be balanced against the fact that there was a degree of Mercian military independence (ASC(C) 916, 917). Finally, the seemingly sanitised comment that 'all the nation in the land of the Mercians which had been subject to Æthelflæd submitted to [Edward]' upon her death (ASC(A) 918), must be compared with the Mercian view, that the 'daughter of Æthelred, lord of the Mercians, was deprived of all authority and taken into Wessex' (ASC(C) 919). It may not be far off the mark to describe Æthelred, Æthelflæd, and Ælfwynn as quasi-regal *subreguli*, who were unable or unwilling to completely break off

their ties with Edward, but the evidence for Mercian subordination is decidedly mixed. Ultimately, the ideology of the 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' may have been less successful in achieving the absorption of Mercia and more something which I would still see as a murky political coup (Davidson 2001).

It is, perhaps, in the aftermath of this coup that the context of the composition of the Parker Chronicle entries from 915–920 should be sought. While Wallace-Hadrill's comment that the *Chronicle* was 'a reflection of urgent political need not of a people, but a dynasty' (1975: 211) may be somewhat off the mark, one can credibly argue that the 'Chronicle of the Triumphs of Edward' reflected Edward's political needs. The chronicler's purpose may have been to win over those Mercians either unamused by Edward's actions, or unconvinced by the wisdom of the new political community in the first place, to the idea that Edward's rule was, in fact, a 'good thing', as evidenced by his spectacularly successful Southumbrian conquests. The submission, as the chronicler saw it, of the Welsh kings, longstanding enemies of the Mercians, in 918 added further icing to the cake (*ASC(A)* 918). Most relevantly for this paper, the chronicler could conclude the account with a triumphant record of Edward's diplomacy involving the northern kings.

It may be controversial to write 'northern kings', as one will note that a regal title is withheld from Røgnald and the sons of Eadwulf. There has been no real debate on the regal status of Røgnald, as he was called a king by both Irish annals and the D and E manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: *AU* 921.4; *ASC(D, E)* 923 [recte 919]). It has been customary, however, taking a cue both from this entry and another in the D manuscript of the *Chronicle* for 927, to deny regal status to the rulers of the northern half of a Northumbria which had been fractured by the conquest of York in 867 (*ASC(D)* 926 [recte 927]). Simon Keynes recently hedged his bets by calling them rulers rather than kings (Lapidge *et al.* 1999: 504–5), but the various sources available are almost unanimous in referring to them as kings. The Northumbrian annals in the *Historia Regum* attributed to Symeon of Durham record three kings, Ecgbert, Ricsige, and another Ecgbert who ruled the 'Northumbros ultra Tine' (the 'Northumbrians beyond the Tyne') from 867 until after 878 (Arnold 1882–5: entries for 867, 873, 876). English sources are silent on their status after this, but in both 913 and 934, Irish annals record the obituaries of 'kings of the north Saxons' who can be associated with those who met Edward in 920 and Æthelstan in 927 (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: *AU* 913.1; Murphy 1896: entries for 905 [recte 913], 928 [recte 934]). Although this evidence is generally dismissed with the comment that the Irish would refer to almost anyone as a king, it would be hasty to dismiss it out of hand.² As Donnchadh Ó Corráin ably explained, the three grade model of Irish kingship presented by the law tracts at latest describes the situation as it was in the eighth century, and things were, in reality, far messier (Ó Corráin 1972: 28–32). The system had broken down for the most part by the tenth century, and in any case, by this time Irish annals rarely

called lower-ranking rulers kings (Ó Corráin 1978: 9–10). Furthermore, excepting kings of Alba, it is even rarer for tenth-century Irish annals to record obituaries of those based in Britain. It is a chastening fact that annalists did not find Edward's obituary worth the parchment, but did record the deaths of his contemporary Eadwulf, 'king of the Saxons of the north' and sister Æthelflæd 'famossisma regina Saxonum' (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: entries for 913.1, 918.5). Æthelflæd's title may appear problematic, as native evidence, most crucially the absence of coins minted in her name, establishes that she almost certainly did not claim the royal title. Yet as Irish kings did not mint coins in this period, this fact would not have influenced the Irish annalist, who was applying royal title to someone who, from the Irish point of view, appeared to be regal. The point of the exercise is that the Irish annalists are unlikely to have gone to the trouble of recording the obituaries of the northern English rulers if they were not kings of some note. The sticking point for the Anglo-Saxon chronicler with regard to the sons of Eadwulf may have been that the idea of an 'English' king other than Edward was unpalatable, or could not be countenanced. This perspective illustrates the 'spin' in the account, and raises further doubts about its credibility.

Indeed, when one begins to dig deeper into these accounts of foreign relations, the chronicler's statements do not inspire confidence. The submission formula applied to both the Welsh and the northern kings, the idea that they had 'sought' or 'chosen' Edward as their lord, is more often applied to the submissions of various army groups and burhs during Edward's conquests (ASC 914; ASC(A) 917, 918; Abels 1988: 82, 89). These were very different submissions to those which could be hypothesised for the Welsh and northern kings. While the other submissions to Edward allowed him to expand his *regnum*, the best he could hope for in a submission between kings is an acknowledgement of his superiority and the imposition of tributary status. Whatever the account of the meeting received, the chronicler chose to represent unfamiliar relationships, whether or not they involved submissions, in the familiar terms which described the cementing of Edward's conquests. One should thus view the chronicler's claims that virtually every person living north of the Humber 'accepted Edward as lord' neither as a flight of fancy, nor a statement of fact, but rather misinformed, or speculative, interpretation.

To explain away the testimony of our only source may appear as an unduly negative approach, but it serves to illuminate the point that it is dangerous to argue on the basis of chronicles, and in the absence of other sources, that any particular species of 'submissions' took place. A brief look forward to another supposed submission, that to Æthelstan in 927, offers some useful comparisons. It is striking here, since it is customary to complain about the lack of evidence which can be applied to Æthelstan, that there is ample corroboration for the chronicler's claim that Æthelstan 'brought under his rule all the kings that were in this island' (ASC D 926

[*recte* 927]). Literary evidence suggests that Welsh kings paid tribute in this period (Williams 1972: 2–3, 6–11), and also provides direct corroboration for the submission of Constantín king of Alba (Lapidge 1981: 98). In charters one can follow the subscriptions of various *subreguli* (Loyn 1980–1: 292–5), while some coins from this period advertise Æthelstan as ‘rex totius Britanniæ’ (Blunt 1973: 46–51). The royal style in some of Æthelstan’s charters from this period also reflects his new-won authority, as he claims himself to be ‘king of the English, raised by the right hand of the Almighty to the throne of the whole kingdom of Britain’ (S 416). Any such supporting evidence is absent in the case of the supposed submission to Edward in 920, although given the lamentable lack of charter evidence for Edward’s reign, absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence in this case. It is not possible to prove the negative, that there was no submission in 920, but the evidence suggests that there are more satisfactory interpretations.

This becomes evident if one takes a broader view of both political developments in Britain during Edward’s reign and the phenomenon of royal gatherings in the Insular World. While such royal gatherings cannot be described as common, one does find a number of examples pre-dating the tenth century. The meetings involving Edward the Elder in 920, Æthelstan in 927 and Edgar in 973 are only the most famous examples, and do not represent a novel departure. In 756 for example, a joint expedition against Dumbarton by Oengus, king of the Picts, and Eadbert of Northumbria culminated in a meeting there in which, if the Northumbrian annalist is to be believed, the Dumbarton Britons ‘accepted terms’ (Arnold 1882–5: entry for 756). There is ample evidence for these sorts of meetings in Irish annals. Various Irish kings met together, most often at common borders or neutral locations throughout the period (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: *AU* entries for 784.8, 838.6, 851.5, 859.3; Mac Airt 1944: entries for 838, 997.2). Although submissions sometimes did occur at these meetings, this cannot be taken as a given. In particular, a quatrain of poetry relating to the meeting in 784 suggests that the Irish were at pains to ensure that participants appeared as equals. The relevant annal simply reads, ‘A royal meeting between Donnchad son of Domnall and Fiachna son of Aed Ron at Inis na Rig in eastern Brega’ (*AU* 784.8). The quatrain of uncertain date, inserted in the margin queries:

What is the meaning
of the meeting at Inis na Rig?
Donnchad cannot go on the sea
And Fiachna cannot come ashore.

Fiachna had apparently arrived by sea, but as Francis Byrne has noted, could not step ashore onto Donnchad’s territory without implicitly acknowledging his superiority, and the same would have applied to Donnchad stepping onto

Fiachna's ship (Byrne 1973: 124). One wonders if any useful diplomacy could have occurred in a shouted conversation from ship to shore, or a powwow in the midst of the surf. But seriously, while much more work is needed before one can move beyond speculation on the likely ritualised nature of diplomacy in tenth-century Britain, some entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* do suggest an attempt at advertising an equal, as opposed to a submissive, relationship. For example, the terms of the 945 alliance between Malcolm king of Alba and King Edmund included a promise by Malcolm to be Edmund's *midwyrhta*, literally a 'together worker' or 'together wright' (ASC(A) 945). Dorothy Whitelock's translation 'ally' also works well, and underlines the fact that a reciprocal arrangement was operating. The same can be said for the meeting at Chester in 973, as the participants promised to be Edgar's *efenwyrhtan*, literally 'even-workers'; once again, no submission is implied (ASC(D, E) 973). If these examples are set alongside that of Æthelstan, it is clear that no single interpretation is appropriate. Concerning the meeting in 920, one must adopt the approach, but not the conclusions of Wainwright (1952), and ultimately turn to its specific political context.

This is all well-trodden ground, so only brief comment is required, but it is clear that everything was happening in the years before 920. At the same time that Edward was embarking on his conquests and effecting, as I see it, a forcible annexation of Mercia, the Scandinavian adventurer Røgnald was engaged in an ultimately successful attempt to carve out a kingdom in Britain for himself. He was very active militarily in northern Britain, and fought at least three battles close to the river Tyne between 913 and 921, as related in the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: AU entry for 918.4; Johnson-South 1990: chs 22, 24). Interestingly, the *Historia* presents evidence that, on at least one occasion, Constantín king of Alba was allied with Aldred and Ucthred, the 'sons of Eadwulf' as the chronicler notes, in a disastrous battle against Røgnald. But the most spectacular of Røgnald's battles occurred in 918, against the forces of Constantín, king of Alba. The lengthy account in the *Annals of Ulster* seems to indicate that Constantín had a slightly better day, as his forces killed two of Røgnald's lieutenants and made 'a very great slaughter of the heathens', while Røgnald had to settle for a mere 'slaughter' of Constantín's men (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: AU entry for 918.4). Røgnald has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Abrams 1998: 22). Here it is sufficient to note that he was able to recover by the next year, when he conquered York, a success which can only have added fuel to an already volatile situation, considering the southern expansion of Constantín's authority and Edward's northward conquests (ASC (D, E) 923 [*recte* 919]). So when the meeting in 920 is assessed, one should recall that the northern kings were a collection of past or current allies, and current, or at least very recent enemies. Several had faced each other in battle a mere two years earlier, and possibly still had axes to grind. One can say little about the final participant in the meeting, the king of the

Strathclyde Welsh, although scattered pieces of evidence over the tenth and eleventh centuries suggest a loose degree of subordination under the king of Alba, in this case Constantín. Steven Driscoll has, however, warned us recently that 'Judging from the archaeological evidence at Govan, we would be wrong to imagine that Strathclyde was the lapdog of the king of Scots' (Driscoll 1998: 114).

The situation faced by the political players in Britain was thus very complex, but it seems most probable that the historical context of the meeting in 920 was the two very recent conquests, those of Edward in Southumbria and Røgnald at York. These conquests were crucial milestones in developments which, over the previous half-century, had completely redrawn the political map in Britain. Both Edward and Røgnald, and perhaps Constantín as well, would have wanted the at least tacit acknowledgement by other kings in Britain of their new spheres of influence. Another strong possibility that must be countenanced is that there was peacemaking involved, with the prime candidates for this activity being Røgnald and Constantín. It should be recalled that it was only seventeen years later that Constantín was fighting alongside Røgnald's successor against Æthelstan at Brunanburh. These conclusions are, however, merely of the 'best guess' variety, for in this, as in so many other questions of early medieval history, there is not enough evidence to reach a completely satisfactory answer. The idea that this meeting represented a 'submission', while it must remain a possibility, does however seem unlikely. The textual context of the chronicler's passage makes his interpretation of the meeting suspect, and ultimately, Edward was in no position to force the subordination of, or dictate terms to, his fellow kings in Britain. This was an achievement which, amongst tenth-century Anglo-Saxon kings, only Æthelstan was spectacularly, but fleetingly, able to effect.

Notes

- 1 I am extremely grateful to T.S. Brown and Alex Woolf for casting a critical eye over this paper, to Simon Keynes for offering useful and generous advice despite our differing interpretations, and to the diligent attention of the editors. Any peculiarities of interpretation, or errors which remain, are, of course, my own.
- 2 One could argue that the use of the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, a very late set of annals translated from Irish into English, is inappropriate in this context. One must make a distinction, however, between annals which could have been manipulated, and those which record 'matter-of-fact' information. It seems likely that annals similar to that in AU913.1, which records the death of 'Etulbb ri Saxan Tuaiscirt', underlie the translated obituaries in *AClon*, which report the deaths of 'kings of North Saxons.'

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